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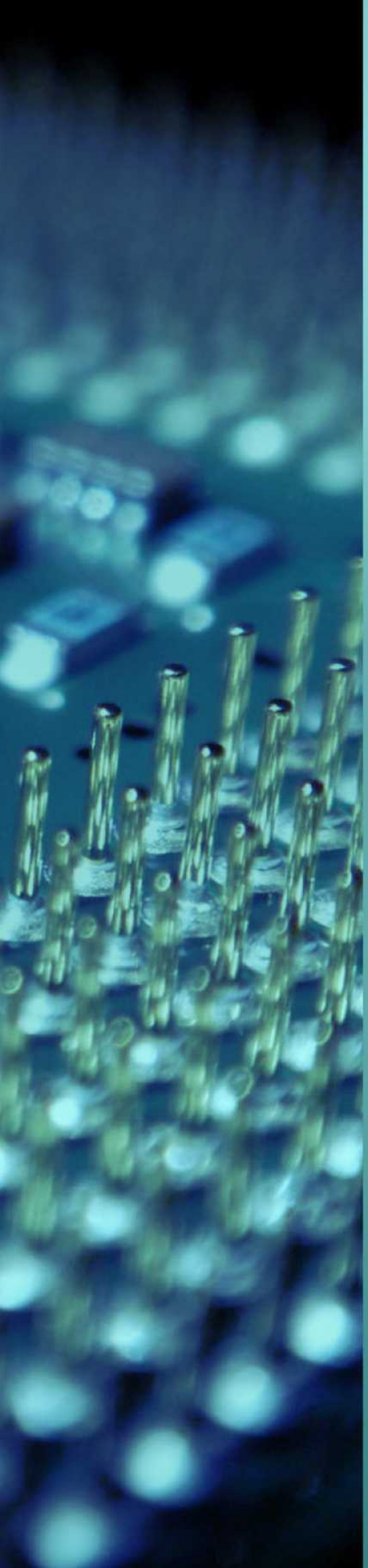




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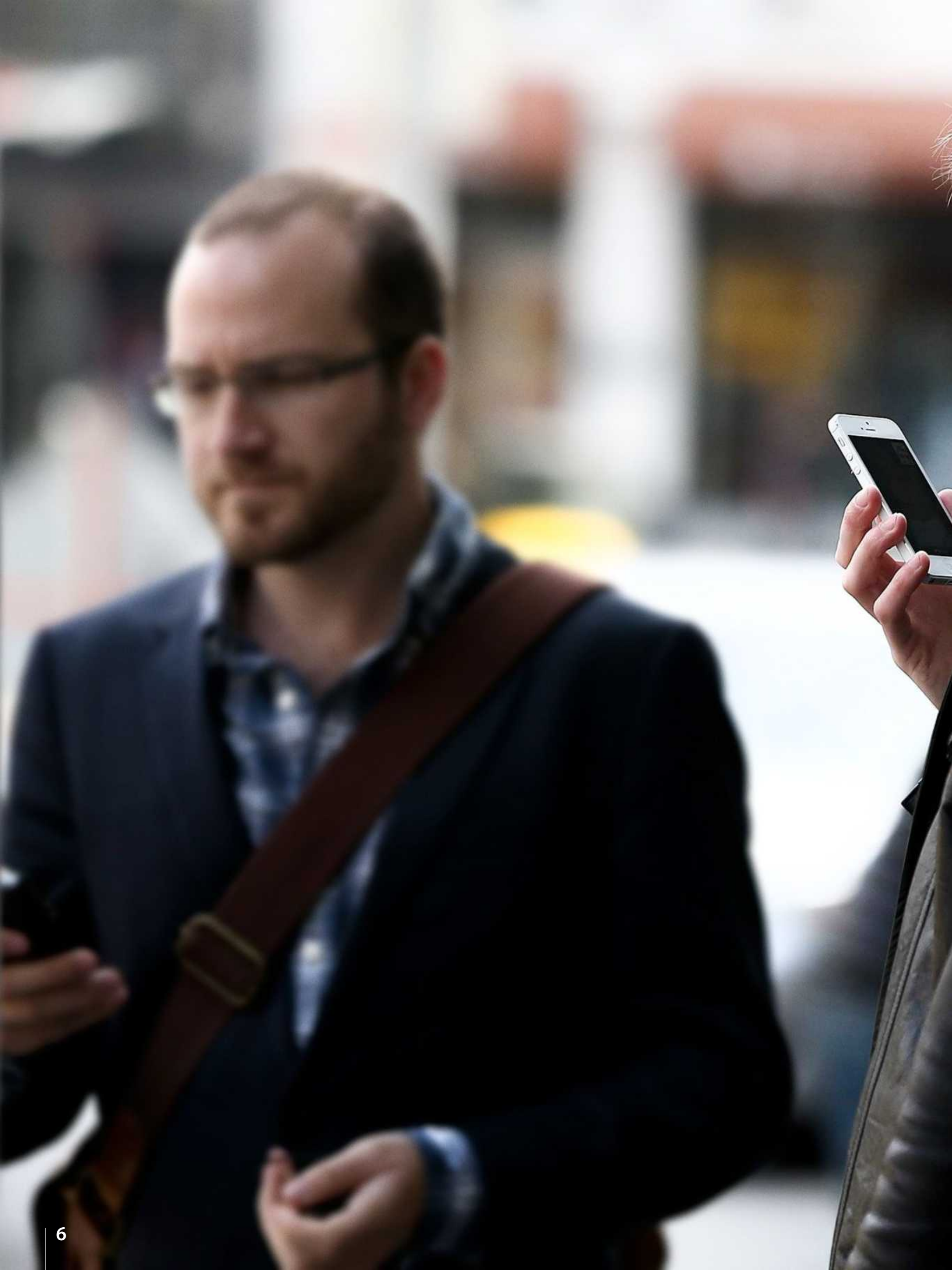
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US CAN'T ACCESS NSA PHONE RECORDS IN CALIFORNIA TERROR CASE

The U.S. government's ability to review and analyze five years' worth of telephone records for the married couple blamed in the deadly shootings in California lapsed just four days earlier when the National Security Agency's controversial mass surveillance program was formally shut down.

Under a court order, those historical calling records at the NSA are now off-limits to agents running the FBI terrorism investigation even with a warrant.

Instead, under the new USA Freedom Act, authorities were able to obtain roughly two years' worth of calling records directly from the phone companies of the married couple blamed in the attack. The period covered the entire time that the wife, Tashfeen Malik, lived in the United States, although her husband, Syed Farook, had been here much longer. She moved from Pakistan to the U.S. in July 2014 and married Farook the following month. He was born in Chicago in 1987 and raised in southern California.

FBI Director James Comey declined to say Friday whether the NSA program's shutdown affected the government's terrorism investigation in California.

"I won't answer, because we don't talk about the investigative techniques we use," Comey said. "I'm not going to characterize it."

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the FBI was poring through records for the married couple: "This includes things like their foreign travel, their contacts with other individuals, their use of social media," he said. "There are some details of that investigation starting to dribble out, sometimes in garbled form."

Amid questions about whether it was constitutional and under pressure from lawsuits and recommendations by two federal panels, the Obama administration agreed to end the NSA phone program. It had secretly collected the daily calling records - but not contents of conversations - for most Americans, including those never suspected of any crime, since at least 2006. Investigators could see who suspected terrorists might be dialing, who else those people might be calling and so on. The government kept five years' worth of each person's phone records, deleting older ones on a rolling basis. NSA contractor Edward Snowden revealed the program's existence in summer 2013.



Image: Jonathan Ernst



Under a shutdown order by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, the government was prohibited from collecting phone records in wholesale ways starting Nov. 29.

"After November 28, 2015, no access to the BR (business record) metadata (phone records) will be permitted for intelligence analysis purposes," U.S. District Judge Michael W. Mosman of Portland ruled. "Hence, queries of the BR metadata for the purpose of obtaining foreign intelligence information will no longer be permitted. "

The California shootings happened four days later. The court revealed the order publicly just hours before the shootings.

Under the new law, passed in June, investigators still can look for links in phone records but they must obtain a targeted warrant to get them directly from phone companies, which generally keep customer records for 18 months to two years, although some keep them longer. The U.S. Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which studied the program at Obama's direction, had recommended that the White House reduce the NSA-held phone records from five years to three years even before the program could be shut down.

Image: Michael Reynolds



The FBI was investigating whether the couple in California plotted the attacks with anyone - or each other - in ways that U.S. or allied intelligence surveillance programs might have detected. The FBI director cited "indications of radicalization by the killers, and of potential inspiration by foreign terrorist organizations," but he said there was no evidence the killers were part of a larger group or terrorist cell. The FBI said it found discarded, crushed cellphones that belonged to the couple near the site of the shootings, and agents were examining the phones' contents.

An American Civil Liberties Union lawyer, Alex Abdo, noted the California shootings were another case where the NSA's inspection of Americans' phone records failed to stop the plot before it happened.

"This could only be an example of the failure of that program," Abdo said. "If this were a planned attack and the program did what they claimed it did at the time, they would have detected this attack. It's not surprising the bulk-collection program didn't detect it."

Online:

Court's order on program shutdown:
http://tinyurl.com/qgbfcc9

Image: Molly Kaplan

TOYOTA HARBORS BIG AMBITIONS FOR "PARTNER ROBOT" BUSINESS

Toyota Motor Corp. is harboring big ambitions to become a significant player in the growing market for robots that help the elderly and other people get around in everyday life.

The company believes it can use its manufacturing expertise to become as crucial in a field it calls "partner robots" as it is to auto-making. Robotics engineers at Toyota currently number only 150 out of a worldwide staff of 300,000 but it is plowing money into research and development.





Image: Shizuo Kambayashi



Image: Shizuo Kambayashi



Toyota last month announced a $1 billion investment in a research company headed by robotics expert Gill Pratt in Silicon Valley to develop artificial intelligence and robotics. It is already working with Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on robotics.

“We are preparing for a future in which people may not be able to drive cars, or they may need artificial intelligence to support them to drive, and once they get off their cars they may need help from partner robots,” said Akifumi Tamaoki, general manager of Toyota’s partner robot division.

The Japanese government is banking on robotics as a growth industry in a society that’s aging at a faster pace than any other industrialized nation. Other companies have jumped in, including Internet company Softbank Corp., which is selling a humanoid that carries on simple conversations.

Speaking to The Associated Press at a Tokyo robot show this week, Tamaoki said Toyota’s robotics interests go back decades, including their use in manufacturing at its auto plants. But it now sees the technology as a viable business in its own right.

Some of that impetus comes from the focus of the auto and tech industries on using artificial intelligence to develop cars that can drive autonomously. Google Inc. is trialing driverless vehicles and Toyota’s Japanese rival Nissan Motor Co. is especially confident about the technology with plans to start selling such vehicles by 2020.

Honda Motor Co. was a leader in robots with its Asimo walking and talking child-shaped robot, in development for more than two decades. But critics say that effort got sidetracked by focusing too much on duplicating human movements and behavior, and lost sight of trying to be useful.

Honda officials acknowledge the company went through soul-searching after getting targeted with public criticism when Asimo could do nothing to help people after the March 2011 nuclear disaster in Japan.

Toyota demonstrated a one-armed partner robot on-wheels loaded with sensors and cameras, earlier this year. The R2-D2 lookalike known as HSR, or Human Support Robot, can pick up after people, bring an item to the bedside or open curtains.

The robot, an improved version of a model first shown in 2012, is not yet for commercial sale. Toyota is collaborating with 10 universities in Japan, with plans to extend that to overseas academic organizations next year, to develop practical uses, Tamaoki said.

Tamaoki believes robots like HSR will gradually become widespread, although that may take another decade.

Among the developments in the works for HSR is another arm, which will allow it to perform more complex tasks, and adding conversational skills. It now comes with a flat panel that works like a videophone or video player, but can't talk.

One research group has proposed using it for taking care of pets, such as jiggling a toy for a lonely cat, according to Toyota.




YOTA

ACTOR MORGAN FREEMAN UNHURT AFTER PLANE'S FORCED LANDING

A plane carrying actor Morgan Freeman and his pilot blew a tire on takeoff from a Mississippi airport and made an emergency landing in which its landing gear collapsed and the plane ran off the side of a runway, authorities said. No one was injured.

Mayor Bill Luckett of Clarksdale, a friend of the 78-year-old Oscar-winning actor, told The Associated Press that the twin-engine plane made what he described as a controlled forced landing just before nightfall Saturday at an airport in Tunica after it had taken off from another airport in his area. Both cities are near each other in northwestern Mississippi, with Tunica about 40 miles southwest of Memphis, Tennessee.

Freeman issued a statement saying he was heading to Texas from Mississippi aboard his plane to shoot a segment for the series, "The Story of God."

"Sometimes things don't go as planned and a tire blew on takeoff, which caused other problems," Freeman said in the statement sent by his publicist. "But thanks to my excellent pilot Jimmy Hobson we landed safely without a scratch."

"I cannot say the same about my plane," Freeman added in the statement, which didn't elaborate on the condition of the aircraft afterward. "I appreciate the concern and prayers for our safety."

Kathleen Bergen, a spokeswoman with the Federal Aviation Administration, identified the plane as an Emivest SJ-30 aircraft and said the plane reported a "mechanical problem" after taking off from Fletcher Field in Lyon, a community just outside Clarksdale.

An FAA statement emailed by Bergen said the plane's original destination was Sugar Land near Houston, but that the aircraft diverted to the Tunica Municipal Airport in Mississippi where it made the emergency landing at 6:15 p.m. local time Saturday. She confirmed its main landing gear had collapsed and that the plane went off the side of the runway after landing.

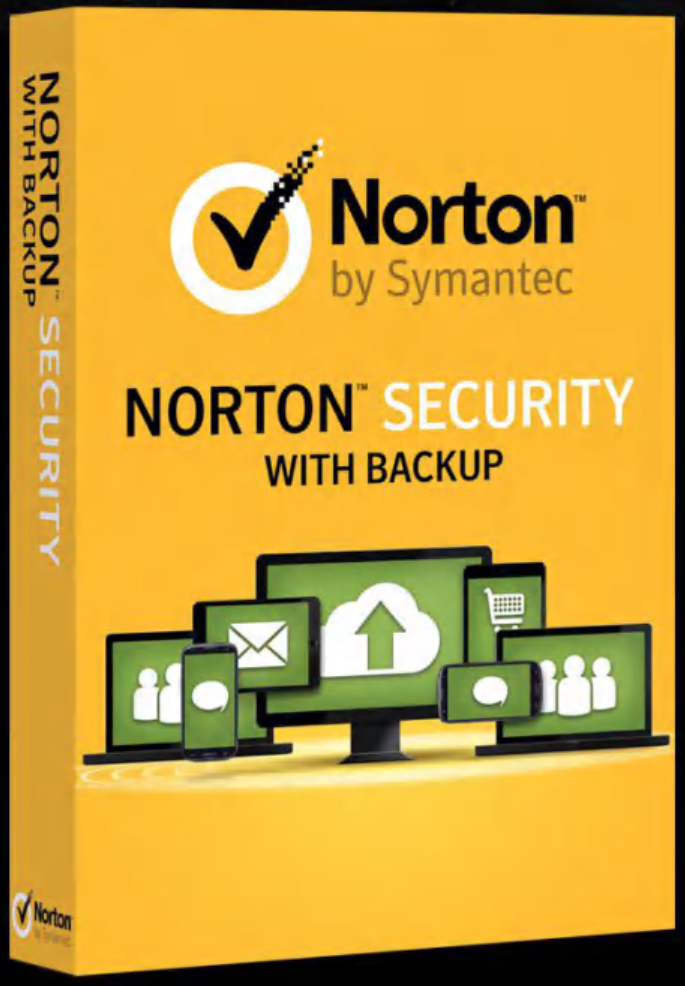
The Clarksdale mayor said another plane subsequently went to Tunica to pick up the actor, who has a home in Mississippi.

Randy Stewart, the chief deputy in the Tunica County Sheriff's Office, confirmed there were no injuries, that Freeman was not piloting the craft and that an inspector would check the plane Sunday.

Freeman was involved in a 2008 car accident that seriously injured the actor and a passenger in Mississippi on a rural highway near his home. No charges were filed and Freeman settled a lawsuit in 2009 that was filed by the passenger.

Freeman is known for his roles in "The Shawshank Redemption," "Driving Miss Daisy," "Seven," and "Invictus." He has been nominated for five Academy Awards and won a best supporting actor Oscar for his role in Clint Eastwood's 2004 film "Million Dollar Baby."

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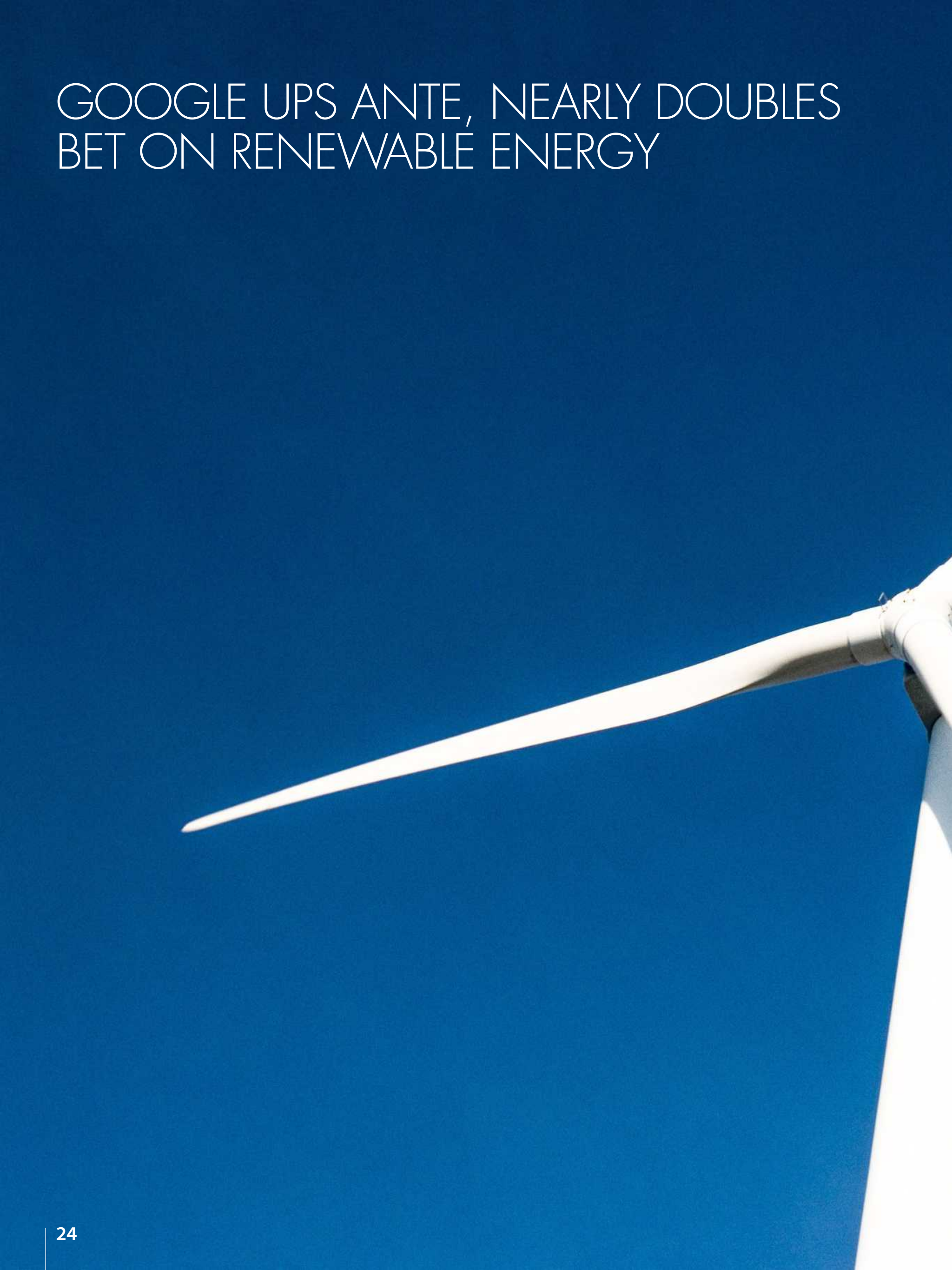
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GOOGLE UPS ANTE, NEARLY DOUBLES BET ON RENEWABLE ENERGY



Google is nearly doubling the amount of renewable energy feeding its massive data centers that enable more than 1 billion people to search for information, watch video clips and communicate virtually anytime they want.

The long-term commitments announced Thursday cover up to 842 megawatts of power that will flow from six different wind and solar power projects scheduled to be finished within the next two years in the U.S., Chile and Sweden. Google isn't disclosing how much it expects to pay for the power.

Some of the deals were signed several weeks ago, but Google timed its announcement to coincide with the U.N. conference in Paris that is exploring ways to reduce the volume of carbon emissions widely believed to be changing the Earth's climate.

"It's an opportune time to make a strong statement," said Gary Demasi, Google's director of data center energy.

Google has now signed contracts covering 2 gigawatts of renewable energy, putting the company closer to its goal of having 3.6 gigawatts lined up by 2025. The 2 gigawatts currently under contract is enough to supply 2 million European homes annually, based on Google's estimate that the renewable energy projects will generate an average of about 7.4 billion kilowatt hours of power.

The Mountain View, California, company has pledged to have all of its 14 data centers worldwide running on renewable energy as part of its quest to minimize the pollution caused by the rising demand for its Internet search engine, YouTube video service, Gmail, digital maps and other services.

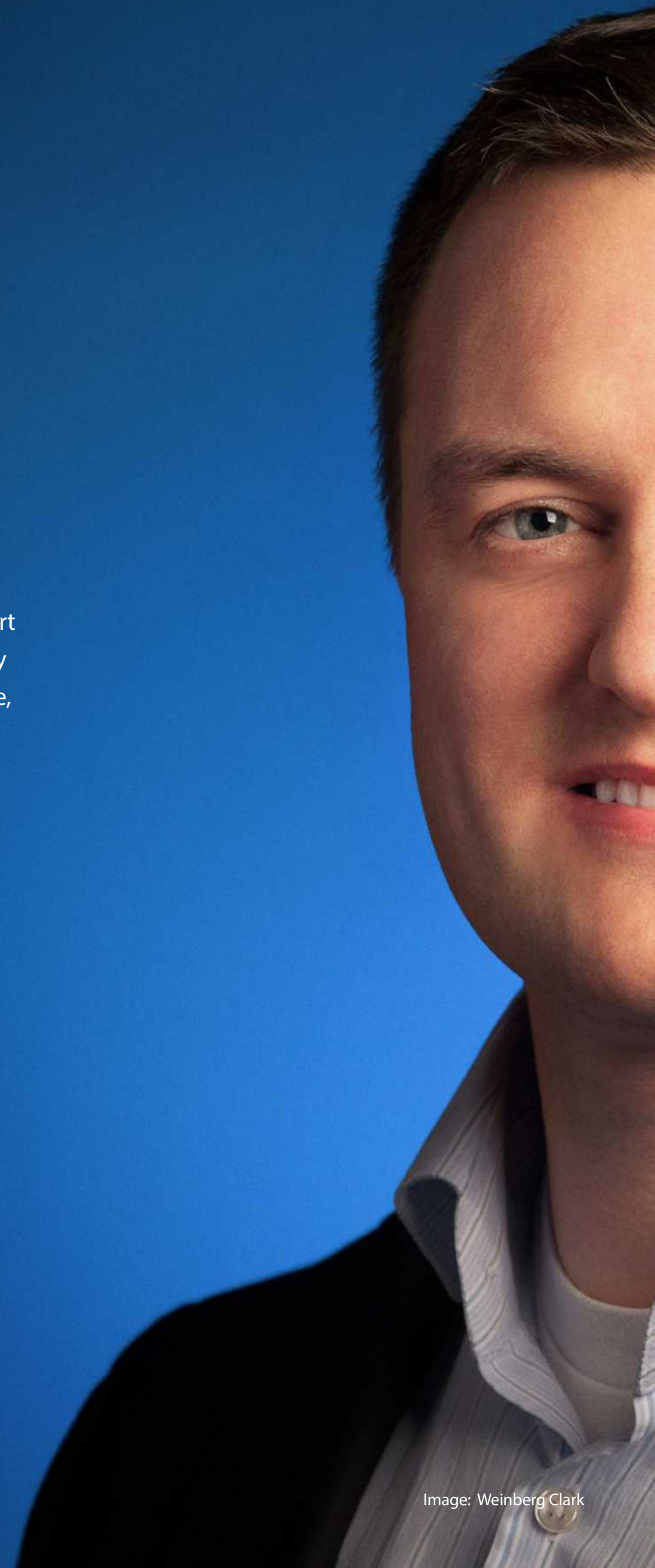


Image: Weinberg Clark





Google, part of a recently formed company called Alphabet Inc., still has a long way to reach that goal. By its latest estimates, renewable energy accounts for 37 percent of the power needed to run its data centers.

Apple, Facebook and other technology companies also have been investing heavily in renewable energy in an effort to reduce the pollution caused by the popularity of their products. All of Apple's data centers, offices and stores in the U.S. already run on renewable energy, but the company is still trying to obtain cleaner power for the overseas factories that make its iPhones, iPads and other devices.

Besides signing long-term contracts with renewable energy providers, Google also has invested about $2.5 billion in companies and projects trying to produce more wind, solar and geothermal power.



FROM FOOD TO MAKEUP, 'STAR WARS' STUFF IS OUT OF THIS WORLD

Right now, in a store not too far away, there is a galaxy of new merchandise connected to "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

Beyond the usual action figures and apparel, the seventh installment in the space franchise (and the first from merchandise-driven Disney) boasts a broader array of branded products than ever before: from Chewbacca Coffee-Mate creamer (Wookiees drink coffee?) and "Star Wars" mascara to $400 designer Death Star shoes and a $4,000 Millennium Falcon bed.

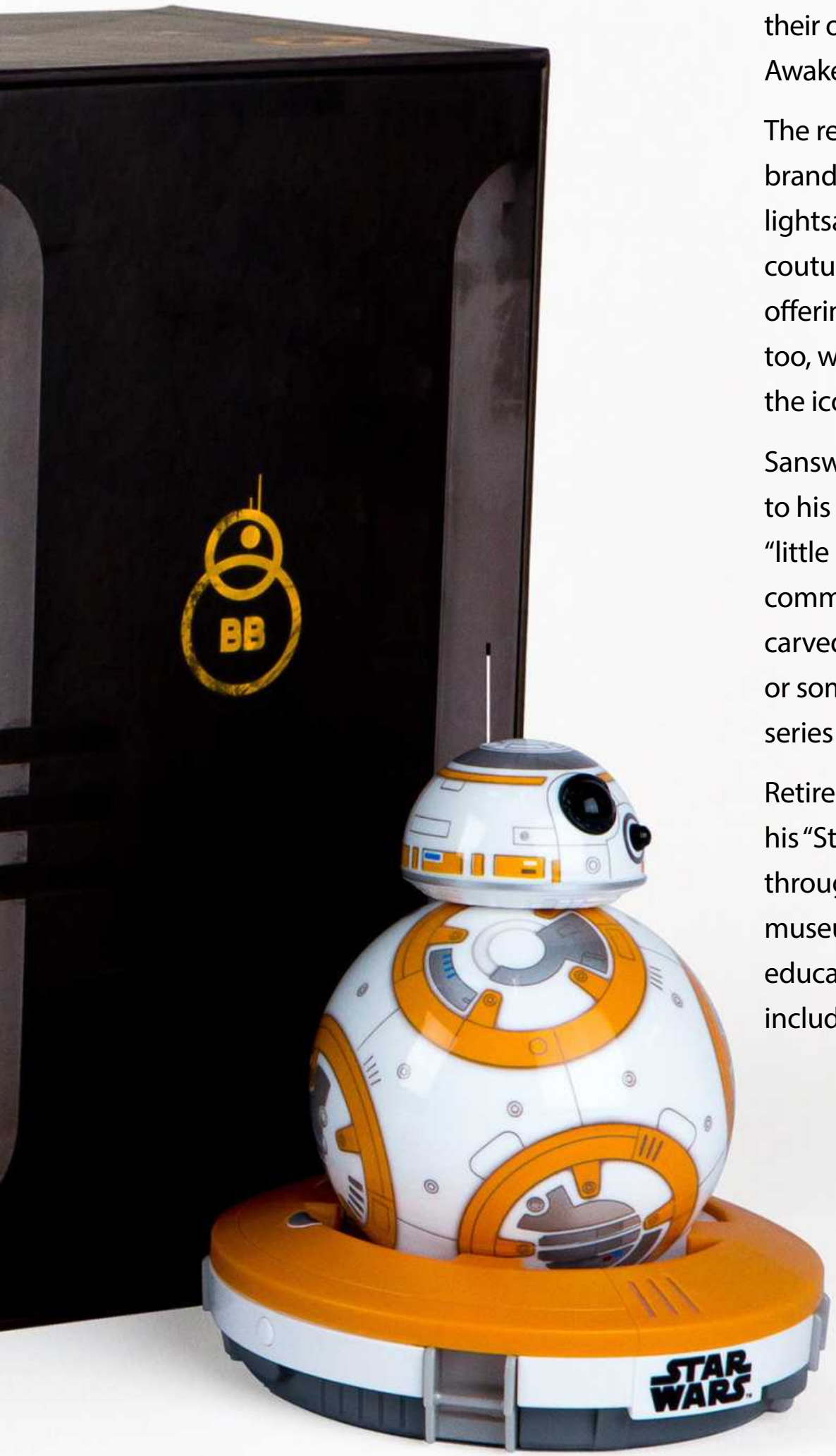
"It's wider and broader and deeper and covers more age ranges and is less gender specific than anything I have ever seen for 'Star Wars,'" said Steve Sansweet, Lucasfilm's former director of fan relations and Guinness world record holder for the largest collection of "Star Wars" memorabilia.

Expanding the universe of "Star Wars" merchandise internationally was part of Disney's original vision when it acquired Lucasfilm, he said: "It was very clear from the front, and they have followed their game plan."




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"Star Wars toys have always played an important role in how our fans interact with the Saga," Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy said when the first "Force Awakens" collectibles were introduced earlier this year. "They've inspired multiple generations to relive the experience of the movies and to create new adventures all their own. These spectacular 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' products will continue that tradition."

The result is an amazingly diverse range of branded items, from the unexpected (light-up lightsaber chopsticks) to the unbelievable (haute couture Stormtrooper wear). International offerings have grown in scope and distinction, too, with local licensees and artisans interpreting the iconic characters for their cultures.

Sansweet recently added some Japanese items to his collection, including soy sauce plates and "little kokeshi dolls, which are typical of a small community in Japan," he said. "They're usually carved in traditional format of samurai or geisha or something like that, and now there's a whole series of 'Star Wars' (characters)."

Retired from Lucasfilm, Sansweet now shares his "Star Wars" collection with the public through his nonprofit Rancho Obi-Wan museum in Petaluma, California, where he offers educational tours and hosts private events, including two weddings.

Here's a look at some of the more unusual items keyed to "The Force Awakens," some of which Sansweet has already added to his collection:

FOOD: Chewbacca isn't the only one with his own Coffee-Mate creamer. Darth Vader, C-3PO, R2-D2 and Boba Fett also got the creamer treatment, and each is a different flavor. (Chewie is spiced latte.) New York's Ample Hills Creamery introduced two new flavors in "Star Wars" packaging: The Light Side is marshmallow ice cream with crispy clusters, and The Dark Side is dark chocolate with espresso fudge brownies.

Other branded food items include special General Mills cereal boxes (one shows the Trix rabbit as Princess Leia) with plastic "droid viewers" inside and Kraft macaroni and cheese with pasta in "Star Wars shapes."

"I'm chasing around trying to find bags of Darth Vader apples," Sansweet said. "It's crazy! But it's fun-crazy."




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COFFEE CREAMER
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COFFEE CREAMER
ITALIAN SWEET CRÈME
ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR
SPICED LATTE
NATURAL & ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS
STAR WARS
LIMITED EDITION PACK
Nestlé
Coffee-mate
COFFEE CREAMER
SPICED LATTE
NATURAL & ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS

MAKEUP: CoverGirl's limited-edition "Star Wars" collection includes nail polish, mascara and lipstick in such shades as Droid, Jedi and Dark Apprentice.

CLOTHING: Beyond the typical T-shirts and PJs, there are one-of-a-kind designer outfits based on "The Force Awakens" characters, such as Halston's gown inspired by villain Kylo Ren, up for auction this month (www.charitybuzz.com) to benefit the Child Mind Institute. American watch maker Devon has a limited-edition "Star Wars" model available for $28,500. The outrageous "Star Wars" collection from British footwear company Irregular Choice is more affordable but may be harder to wear. The C-3PO flats are cute and low-key, but the Death Star platform booties with the Stormtrooper- and Darth Vader-shaped heels are out of this world.




STAR WARS
THE FORCE AWAKENS
COVERGIRL
outlast
stay brilliant
nail gloss





LIFESTYLE: Adult collectors might covet Pottery Barn Kids' Millennium Falcon bed, modeled after the legendary starship (and only available in twin size). American Tourister has a line of "Star Wars" luggage, and the Disney Store has a backpack shaped like a Stormtrooper helmet. There's a Darth Vader toaster that brands your breakfast bread with the "Star Wars" logo and the aforementioned light-up lightsaber chopsticks, plus an X-Wing knife block and many other household items.

Is there anything that can't be branded "Star Wars?"

"There are limits," Sansweet said. "I'm not sure we've seen the end of the limits yet."

Online:

www.ranchobiwan.org



NIELSEN: SMARTPHONES AND THE INTERNET ARE EATING OUR TV TIME



The use of Internet-ready devices like smartphones appears to have seriously cut into the time Americans spend watching traditional TV, new Nielsen data show, potentially undermining the notion that mobile devices merely serve as "second screens" while people are plopped in front of the set.





Data provided to The Associated Press show an increase in the number of 18-to-34-year-olds who used a smartphone, tablet or TV-connected device like a streaming box or game console. That grew 26 percent in May compared with a year earlier, to an average of 8.5 million people per minute.

Those devices, which all showed gains in usage, more than offset declines in traditional TV, radio and computers. In the same age group, the demographic most highly coveted by advertisers, use of those devices fell 8 percent over the same period to a combined 16.6 million people per minute.

It's not a one-to-one tradeoff, though. Sometimes people are using smartphones while watching TV, or using them outside the home where it wouldn't cut into TV time. In addition, some mobile device use is, well, to watch TV shows.

Nielsen's inaugural "Comparable Metrics" report for the first time presents data on average use per minute, making it possible to directly compare various devices. The study counts all apps, Web surfing and game play but not texts or calling.

The results confirm a trend in other Nielsen data that found viewing of traditional TV - through a cable or satellite connection or an antenna - peaked in the 2009-10 season.

"It's pretty clear the increased use of mobile devices is having some effect on the system as a whole," said Glenn Enoch, Nielsen's senior vice president of audience insights.

The audience for TV viewing alone fell by 10 percent, to 8.4 million people a minute, in the 18-to-34-year-old category.

The new Nielsen data also looks at time spent watching video on various devices, but not for TV-connected devices, where users were clocked playing games as well.

However, even excluding TV-connected devices, the shift in video watching away from the TV is pronounced.

For the young group, viewing on TVs fell 10 minutes to an average of 5 hours and 43 minutes a day. That's more than compensated for the 33-minute gain in viewing video on computers, smartphones and tablets, which rose to 3 hours and 43 minutes.

Since Nielsen inaugurated its tracking service in 1949, average daily TV viewing has grown steadily, from 4 hours and 35 minutes a day to a peak of 8 hours and 55 minutes in 2009-10. That increase coincided with growing numbers of TV sets sold and the proliferation of programming on cable channels.

But viewership has been declining ever since. From late September until mid-November this year, daily TV watching accounted for only 8 hours and 13 minutes, Nielsen said.

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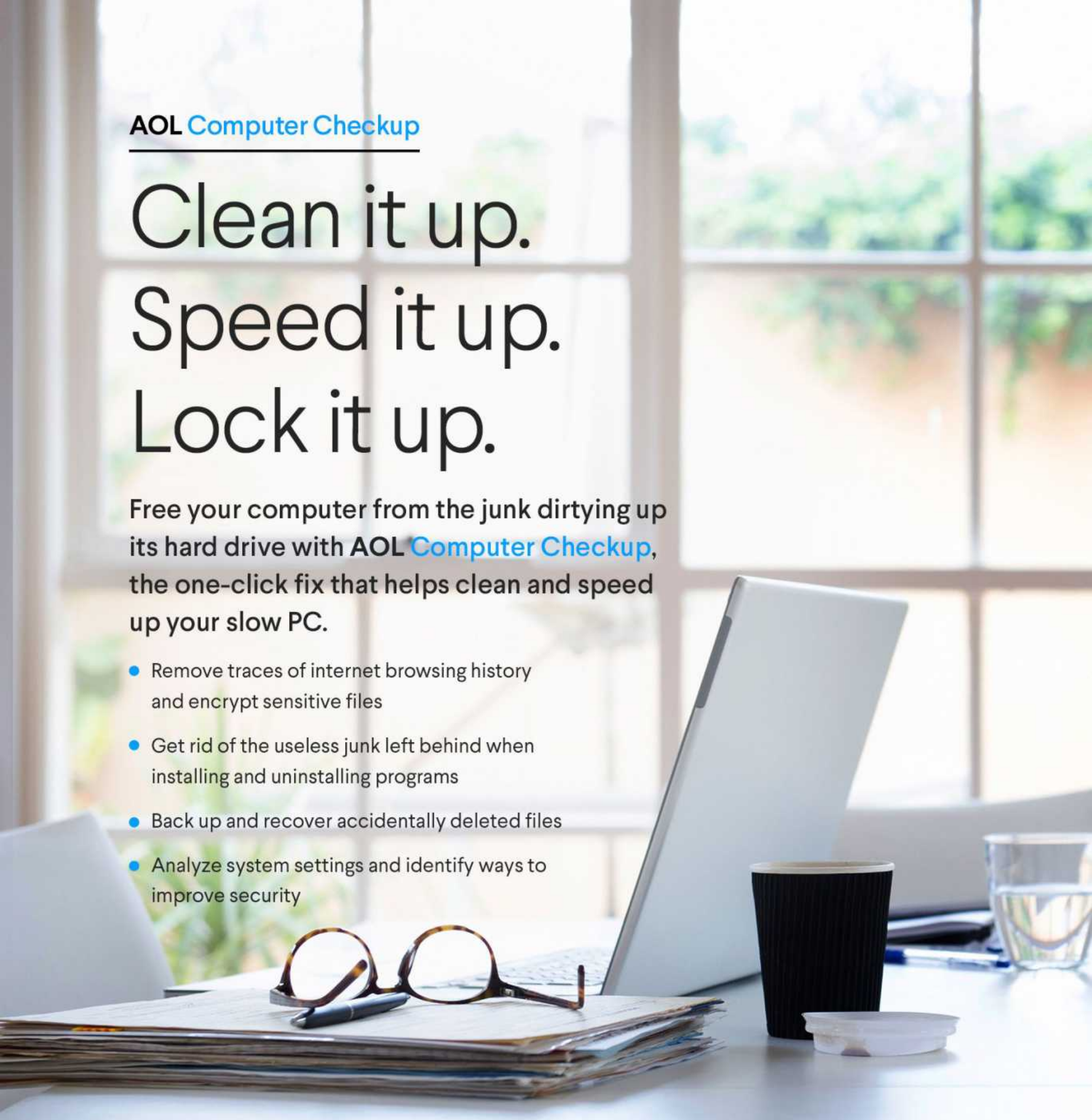
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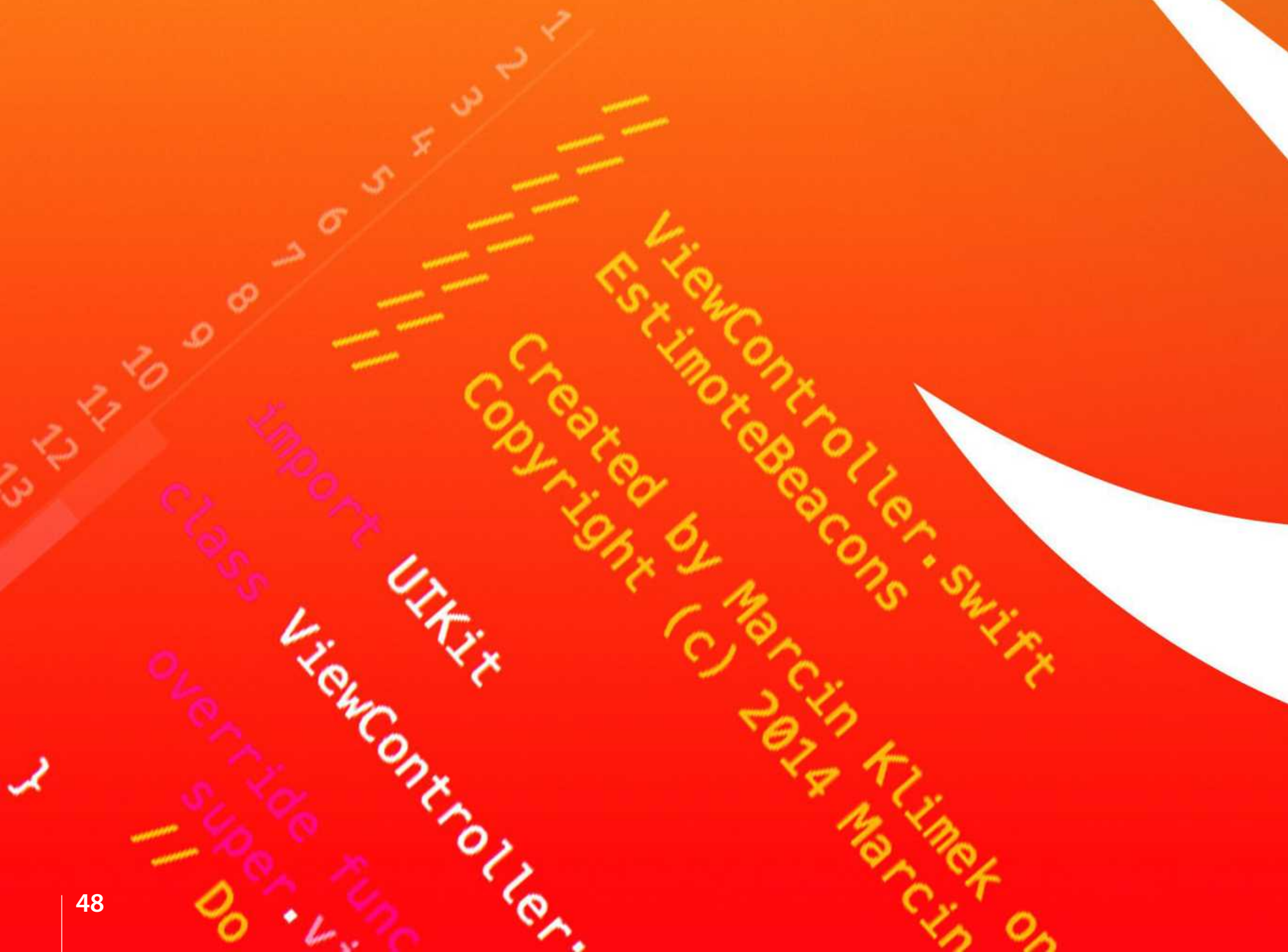
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import UIKit
class ViewController: UIViewController {
override func viewDidLoad() {
super.viewDidLoad()
// Do any additional setup after loading the view, typica
}
override func didReceiveMemoryWarning() {
super.didReceiveMemoryWarning()
// Dispose of any resources that can be recreated.
}
}
Marcin Klimek on 03/06/14.
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WHAT IT ALL MEANS FOR CONSUMERS

They said earlier this year that they'd make it happen, and now, it has at last come to fruition: **the team behind Apple's programming language, Swift, has now made it freely available for open source developers**. It's an obvious attempt by the Cupertino giant to land a bloody nose on its famously open source rival Android, but there's so much more to this move than that - it could also herald an exciting new era of Apple app development.

This all sounds like a very dry subject that is anything but dry - but because we have to, let's attend to the drier stuff first. Swift was only announced at Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) in 2014, and this latest switch of the code to open source once again demonstrates how far ahead Apple is of the pack in terms of presenting developers with new opportunities to profit from apps for its various platforms.

In the case of Swift, those platforms include not only the time-honored iOS and OS X, but also the much more recently introduced watchOS and tvOS - the latter the platform for the latest fourth-generation Apple TV. With the universe for iOS developers already an impressive one, a new generation of personal developers and business enterprises is now emerging, **rumors even suggesting that they could soon be pocketing a greater percentage of app revenue**.

Image: Bryan Derballa

THE BIG SWIFT NEWS - AND ITS BIG IMPLICATIONS

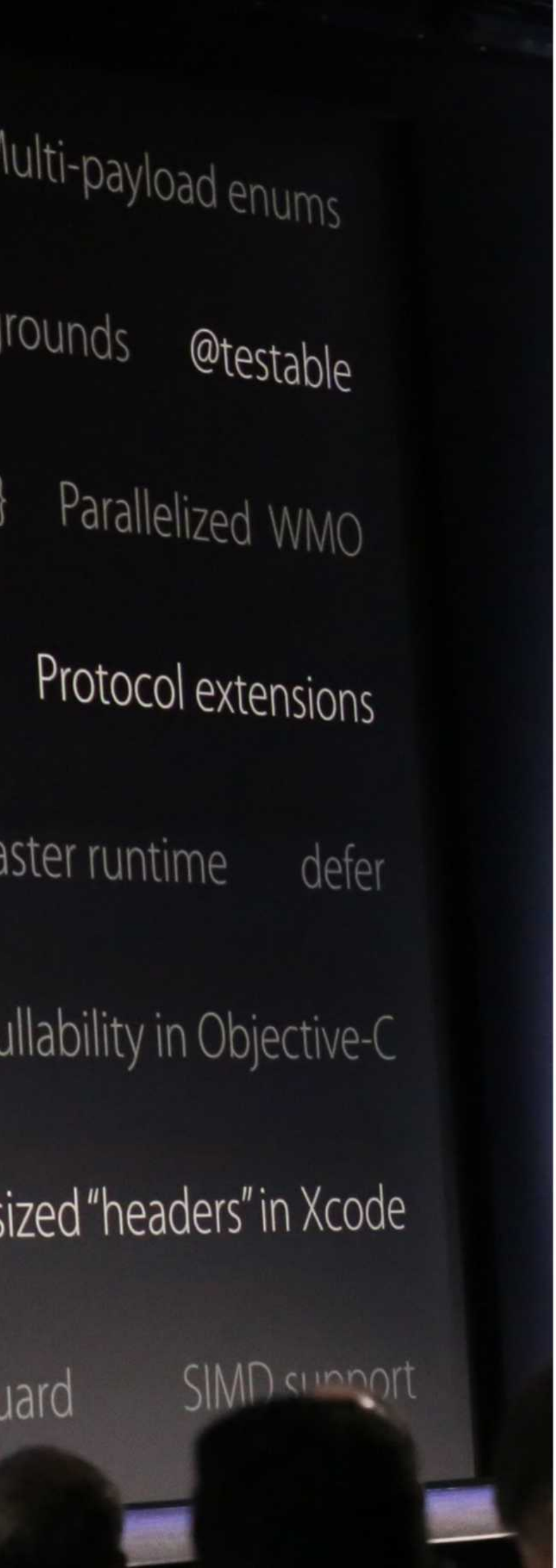
Apple's posting of the source code for the Swift compiler and standard library functions and objects has effectively liberated the wider developer community to set up the code to run on a server, among many other potentially useful things beyond the mere making of iOS and OS X apps.

The move certainly gives Swift a life beyond Apple, meaning that even in the unlikely event of the company abandoning its own use of the language in future, programmers could theoretically pick it up, further its development and continue support for existing codebases. In the words of the Swift team themselves, "After Apple unveiled the Swift programming language, it quickly became one of the fastest growing languages in history... Now that Swift is open source, you can help make the best general purpose programming language available everywhere."

It does admittedly remain to be seen just how open Apple is in its approach to open sourcing Swift - the official site stating that "small incremental improvements" are preferred. However, with Apple going further than many developers had expected in publishing code for the raw language compiler in addition to the Swift standard library and parts of Foundation, this is still a very momentous step taken by the men and women at Cupertino.


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Availability checking
Shorter compile time
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APPLE APP DEVELOPMENT COULD BECOME EVEN MORE ATTRACTIVE

There has already been a positive response to Apple's Swift announcement, with IBM, for example, **unveiling its Swift Sandbox website consisting of two columns** - the left hand one housing a text editor for the entry of lines of code, and the right one showing the output when that code is run on a Linux server. It is a merely rudimentary - albeit cool - demo at the moment, but does nonetheless signal IBM's interest in supporting Swift and its faith in the code's open source potential.

That is a frightening proposition for longtime rivals like Google and Microsoft, given how comprehensively they already trail Apple in the app game - in terms of not just the sheer numbers and variety of apps that they can offer, but also the money that developers can make from them. One might imagine, for instance, that Android would be lording it over Apple in this department by now, given its greater market share than iOS as well as the much higher number of app downloads that Google's Play Store can boast over the Apple App Store.

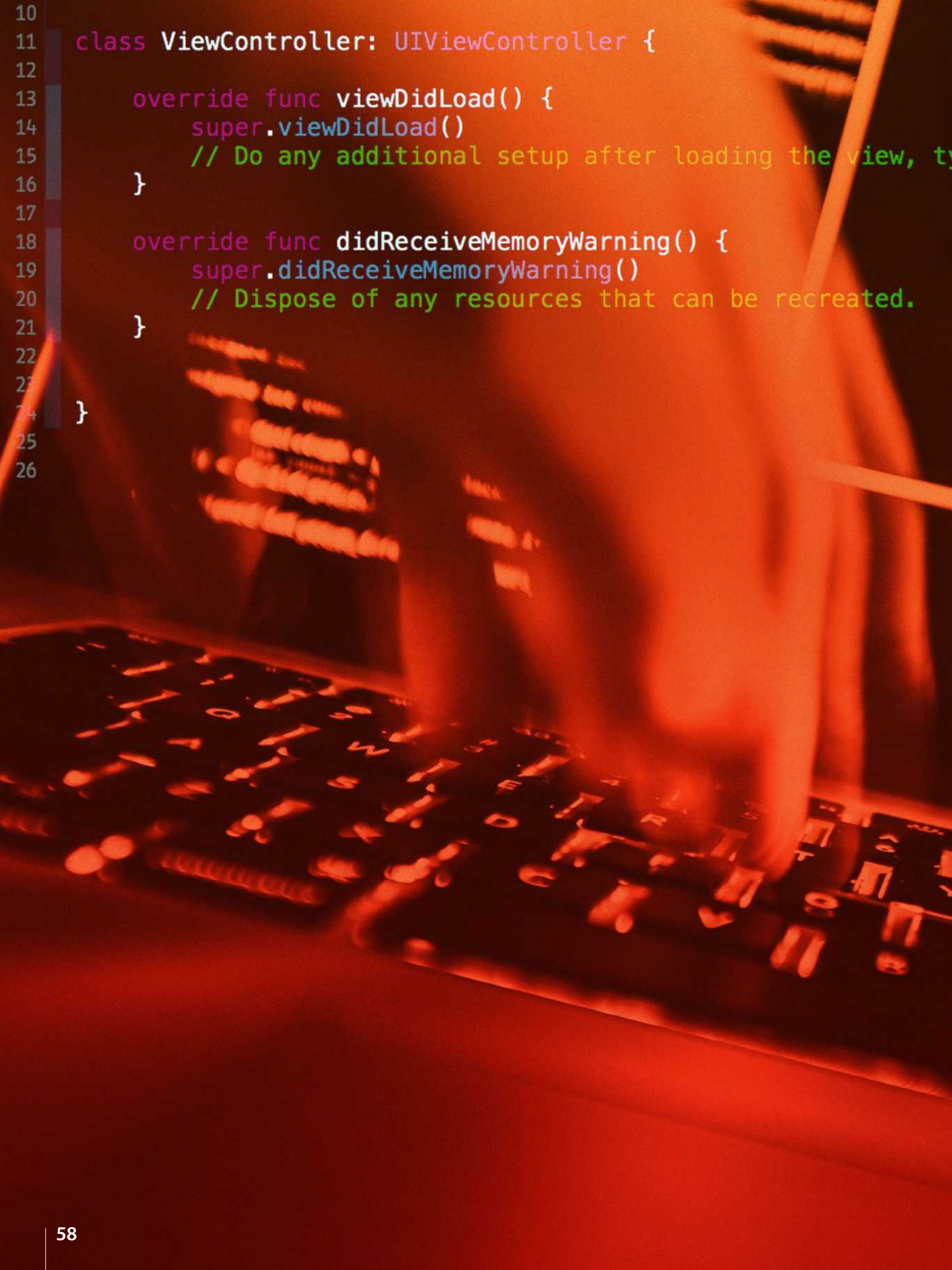
Despite this, the app store analytics firm App Annie actually disclosed in a report last April that far more revenue was generated by apps downloaded on iOS than those downloaded via the Play Store - **iOS users also spending about four times more on apps than their Android counterparts**. Furthermore, Apple's strong progress in China - even among the first-time buyers who might have been expected to opt for Android - suggests that the long-term revenue gap between the two platforms could rise yet further rather than narrow.

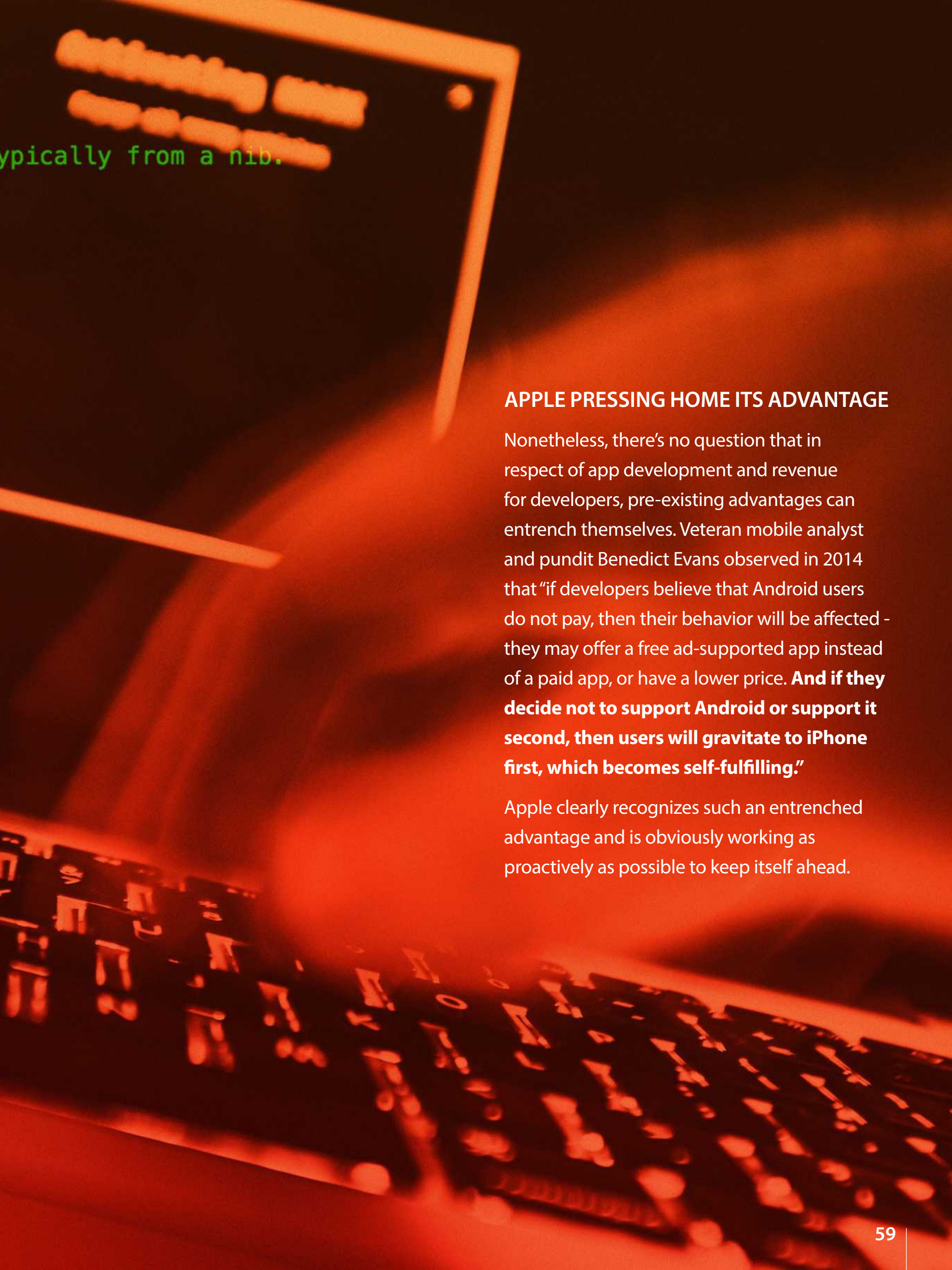
SCARY APP REVENUE STATISTICS FOR RIVALS

Such findings back up a similar August 2013 report on the Forbes site, in which contributor Tristan Louis analyzed known data and found that while Google enjoyed about 900 million users compared to the then 600 million that Apple could boast, **the search giant was only paying around $900 million to its developers, completely dwarfed by the $5 billion handed over by Apple**.

More to the point, an average, an Android developer generated $0.01875 per download, well beaten by the equivalent $0.1 seen by Apple developers, and while Android developers saw average revenue per app of $1,125, that figure jumped to $4,000 for those developing for the Cupertino giant's platforms. As for Microsoft, well, it was barely in the picture, only forking out around $100 million to its developers and giving them an average revenue per download of $0.1538, adding up to an average revenue per app of $625.

Louis did conclude back then that there was "some hope" for Apple's rivals, suggesting that "While Apple has developed a rich market for developers, Google and Microsoft both have opportunities to improve." He advised Google to focus its efforts on "helping developers monetize their apps so they can come more in line with what Apple can offer", while "For Microsoft, the story is all about the number of users. If they were to manage their average revenue per app while growing their user base, they could potentially out-earn all the other platforms."


class ViewController: UIViewController {
override func viewDidLoad() {
super.viewDidLoad()
// Do any additional setup after loading the view, t
}
override func didReceiveMemoryWarning() {
super.didReceiveMemoryWarning()
// Dispose of any resources that can be recreated.
}
}



APPLE PRESSING HOME ITS ADVANTAGE

Nonetheless, there's no question that in respect of app development and revenue for developers, pre-existing advantages can entrench themselves. Veteran mobile analyst and pundit Benedict Evans observed in 2014 that "if developers believe that Android users do not pay, then their behavior will be affected - they may offer a free ad-supported app instead of a paid app, or have a lower price. **And if they decide not to support Android or support it second, then users will gravitate to iPhone first, which becomes self-fulfilling."**

Apple clearly recognizes such an entrenched advantage and is obviously working as proactively as possible to keep itself ahead.



Image: David Paul Morris



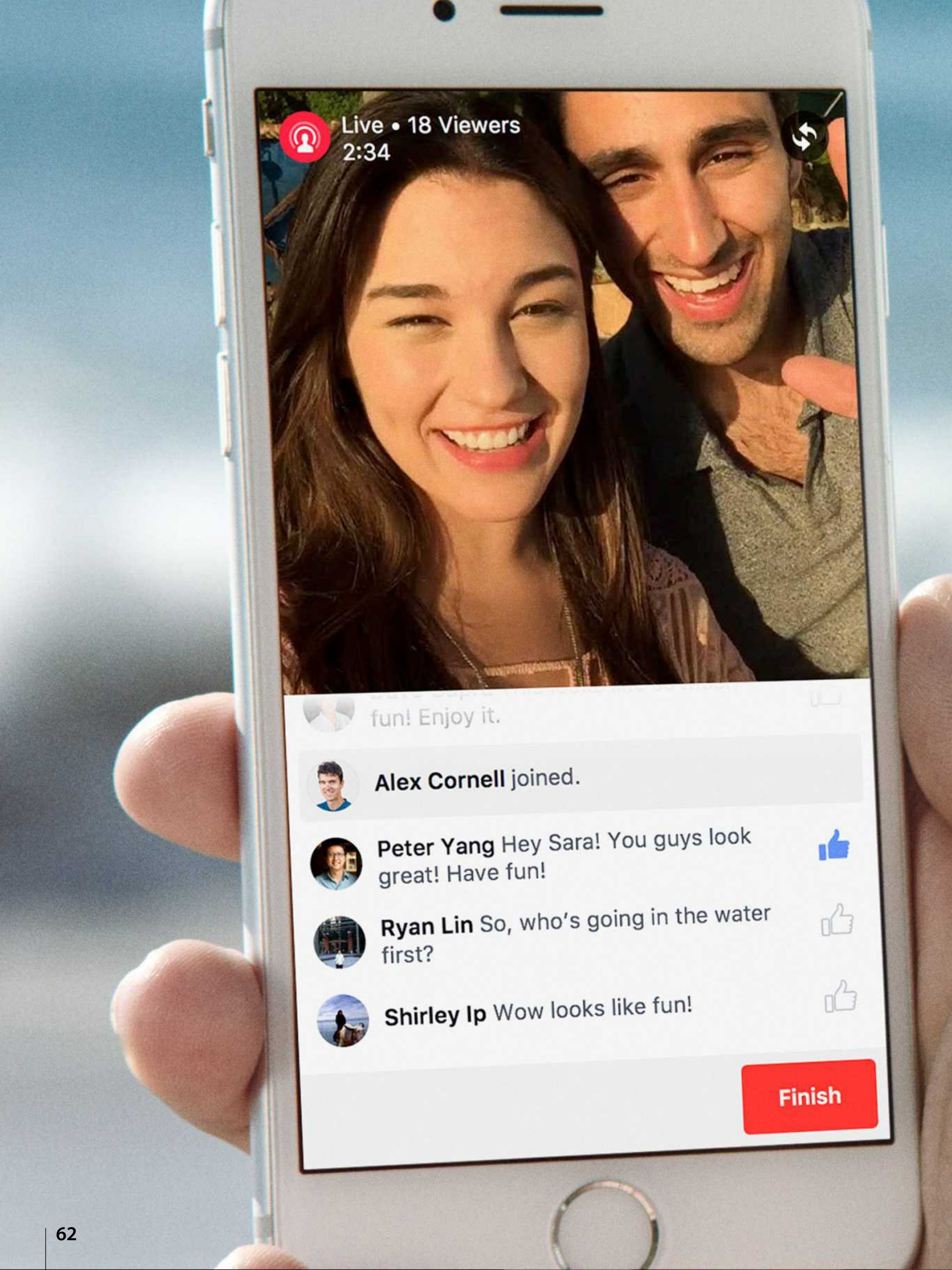
These are, after all, heady and exciting times for Apple, the fourth generation of its Apple TV digital media player finally breaking cover in October along with the tvOS platform, which the Cupertino firm has hailed as **"an innovative TV platform that redefines what can be done in the living room."**

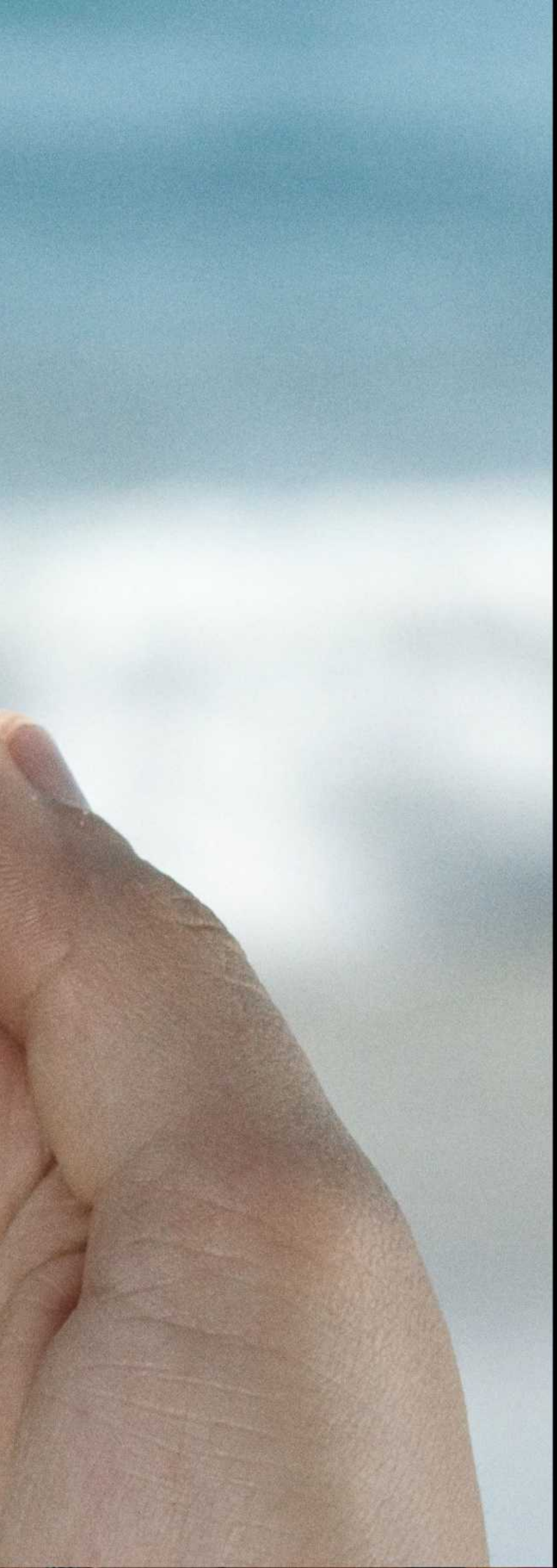
The latest Apple TV has already been described as a product of great significance to Apple's future, even if the eventual applications that will make it so haven't become entirely clear yet. It would appear to have the potential, in the words of one observer, Jeff Benjamin of iDownloadBlog, **"to be a great streaming device... a wonderful music playing machine... [and] an awesome gaming console**. It has the potential to really become your living room's nucleus for entertainment."

With tvOS even boasting its own in-built App Store, you can safely bet that the creation of all manner of weird, wonderful and downright pioneering apps will be absolutely central to the device's eventual success. When you consider the potential of the new Apple TV across the full range of entertainment categories, and even suggestions that Apple could be forced to lower the 30% cut that it has long taken from app revenues, the ingredients seem right for an emerging 'golden age' of Apple app development.

It all adds up to an extremely exciting future for the technology titan that continues to go from strength to strength under CEO Tim Cook. ■

by Benjamin Kerry & Gavin Lenaghan


Live • 18 Viewers
2:34
fun! Enjoy it.
Alex Cornell joined.
Peter Yang Hey Sara! You guys look great! Have fun!
Ryan Lin So, who's going in the water first?
Shirley Ip Wow looks like fun!
Finish



FACEBOOK EXPANDS SHARING OPTIONS TO INCLUDE LIVE VIDEO

Get ready to start watching live video of your friends and family doing something fun, boring or even dumb on Facebook.

The world's largest social network is testing a new feature that will enable its 1.5 billion users to use their smartphones to shoot video so other people can see what they are doing as it happens.

Facebook began testing the live video option Thursday among a sliver of its U.S. audience with iPhones. The Menlo Park, California, company didn't specify when everyone with a Facebook account and a smartphone will have an opportunity to broadcast live.

The feature represents Facebook's latest challenge to online messaging service Twitter, which introduced a live video application called Periscope earlier this year. Another popular app called Meerkat also can be used to share live video in social circles.

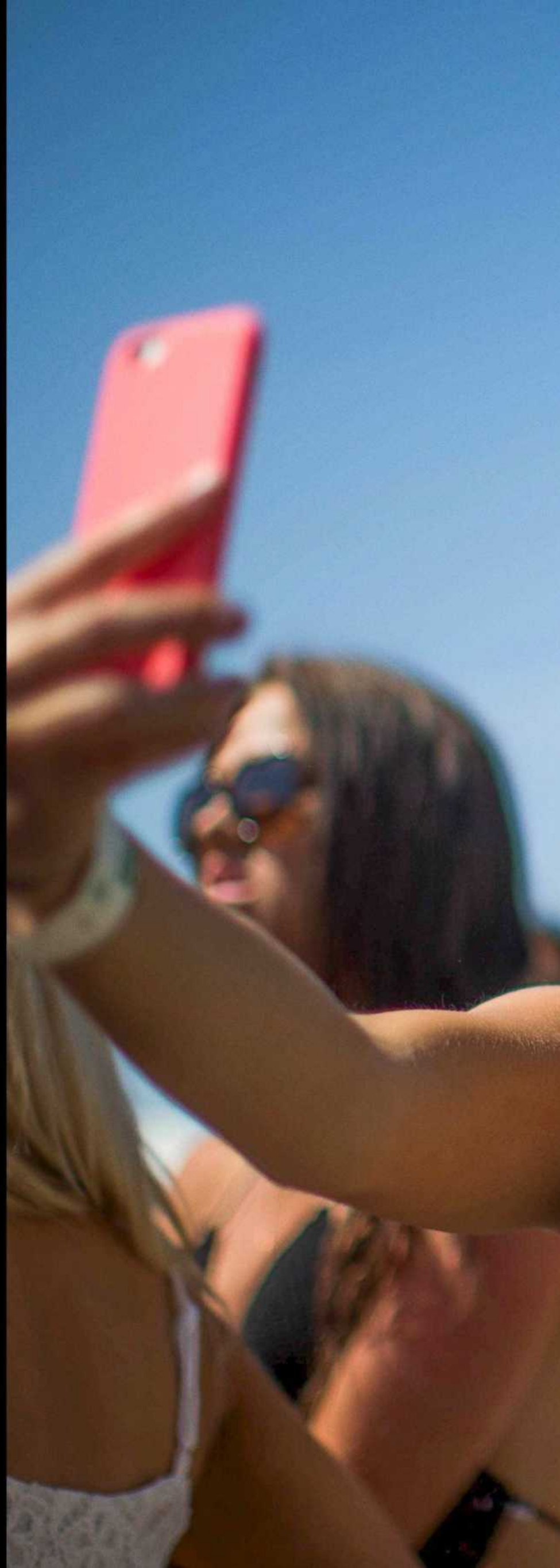
This isn't the first time that Facebook Inc. has copied others' ideas in an attempt to ensure its social network remains the leading digital hangout.

In recent years, Facebook also has embraced the hashtag symbol, a Twitter technique for flagging major events and topics of conversation, and cloned an option to check into specific places that was popularized by Foursquare.

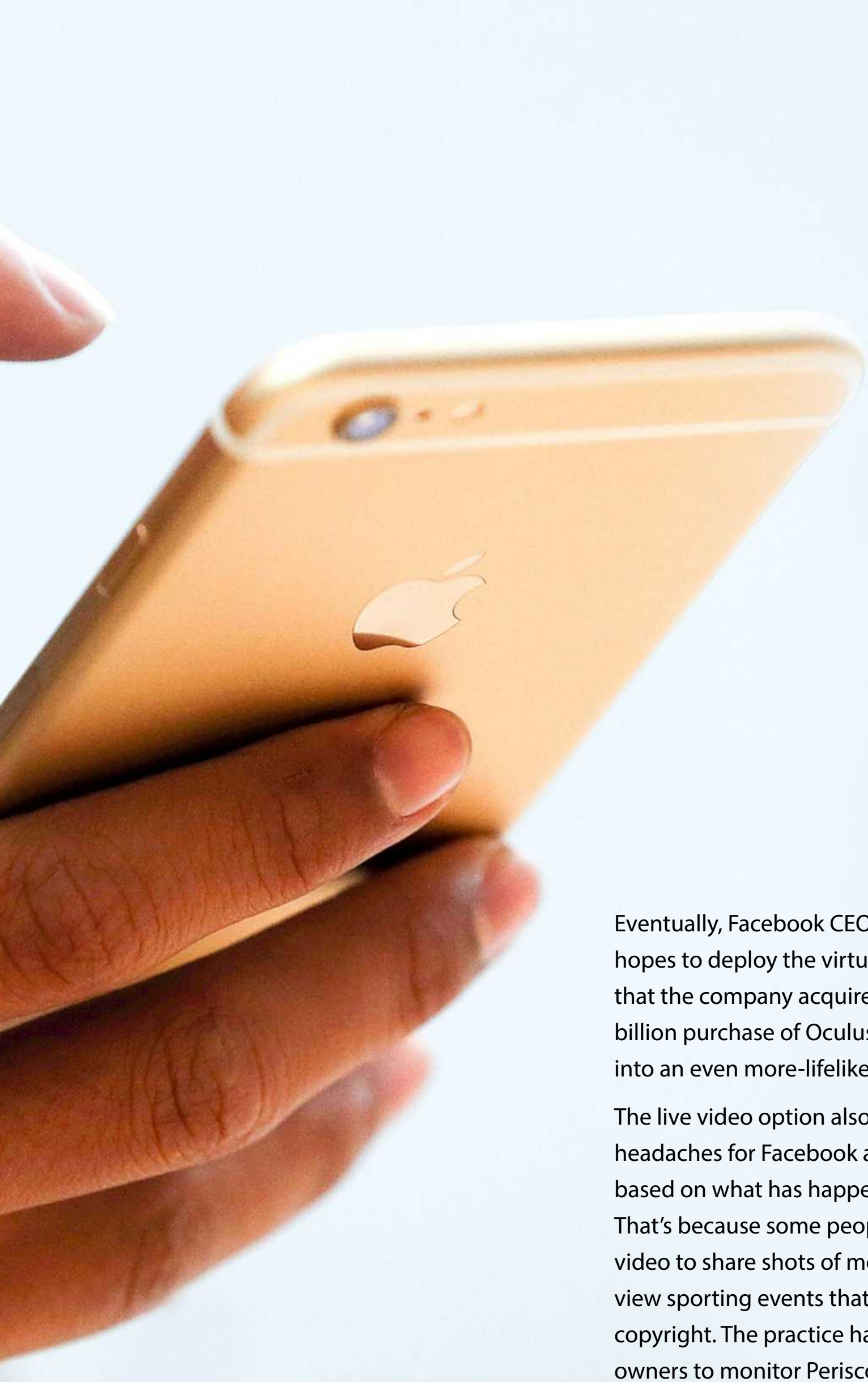
In another move of mimicry, Facebook is introducing another feature called "Collage" that will automatically bundle photos and video taken in the same place or at the same event into a slideshow. The concept mirrors a feature that Google introduced in its Plus social network years ago and imported into its Photo app six months ago.

The Collage option initially will be available on Facebook's iPhone app before expanding on to its version for Android phones early next year.

Facebook is touting live video and Collage as a leap forward in its attempt to bring its users closer together even though they may be located thousands of miles apart. The idea is to allow people to feel as if they are on the same beach on a Hawaiian vacation, in the same kitchen while testing out a new recipe, in the same living room unwrapping Christmas gifts, or in the same row singing together during the concert of a favorite band.



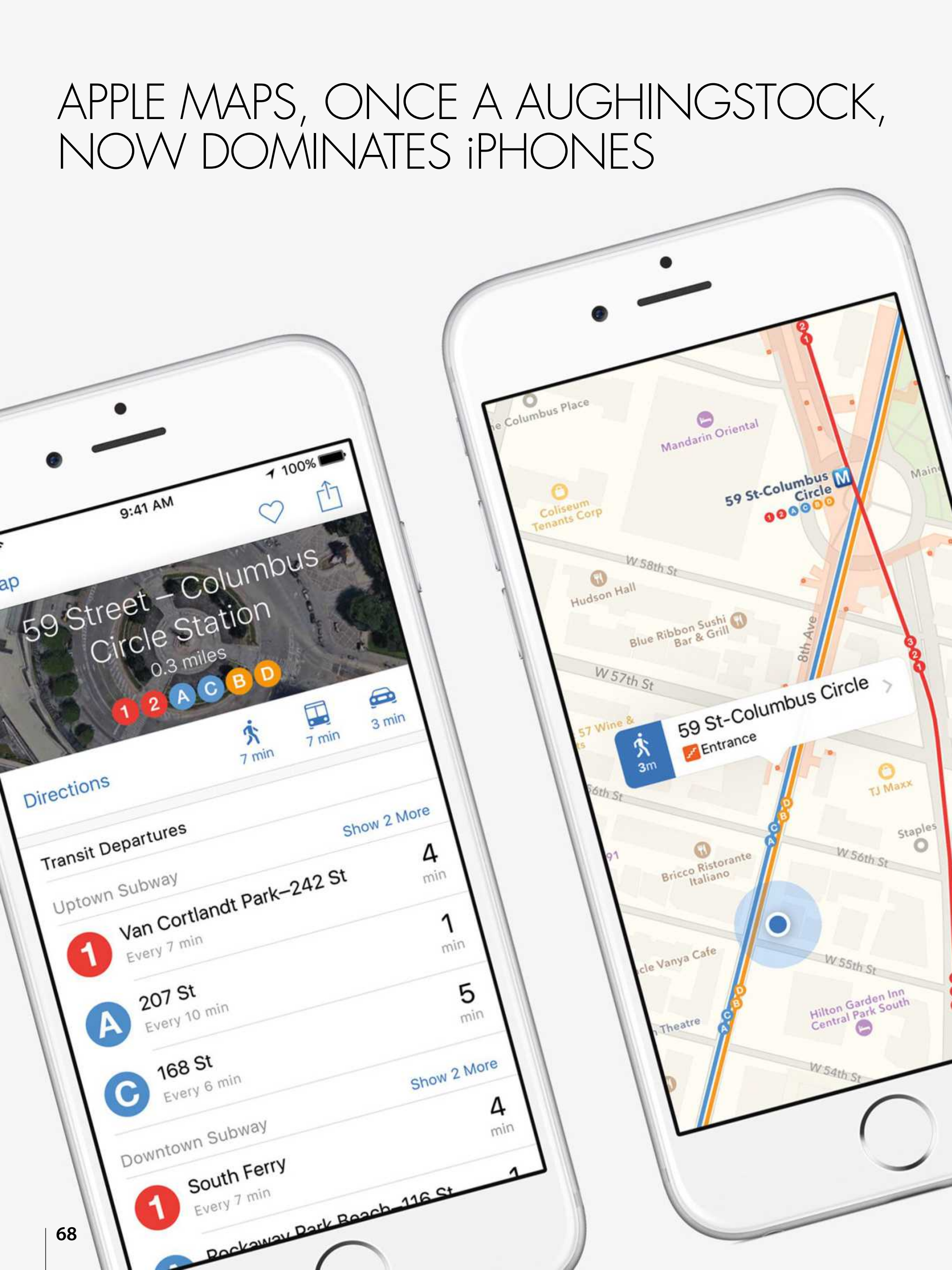


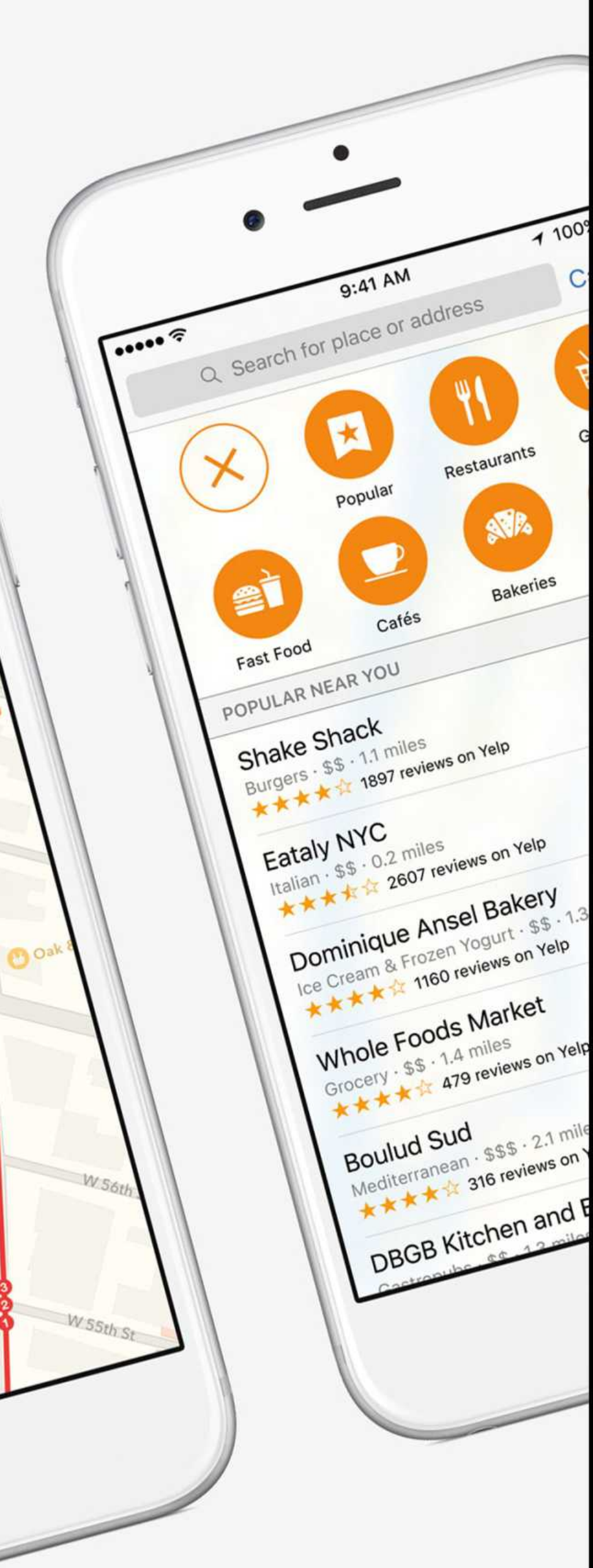


Eventually, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg hopes to deploy the virtual reality technology that the company acquired last year in a $2 billion purchase of Oculus to transform video into an even more-lifelike encounter.

The live video option also could create legal headaches for Facebook and copyright owners, based on what has happened with Periscope. That's because some people have used live video to share shots of movies and pay-per-view sporting events that are protected by copyright. The practice has forced copyright owners to monitor Periscope for violations of their rights and notify Twitter so it can block or take down the videos.

APPLE MAPS, ONCE A AUGHINGSTOCK, NOW DOMINATES iPHONES





Apple Maps quickly became the butt of jokes when it debuted in 2012. It overlooked many towns and businesses and misplaced famous landmarks. It marked New York's Madison Square Garden arena as park space because of the word "Garden." The service was a rare blunder for a company known for simple, easy-to-use products.

It's a different story three years later.

Apple fixed errors as users submitted them. It quietly bought several mapping companies, mostly for their engineers and other talent. This fall, it added transit directions for several major cities, narrowing a major gap with Google. Apple Maps is now used more widely than Google Maps on iPhones.

"They really did a great job in a short amount of time," said Alex Mackenzie-Torres, a former Google Maps manager who's now with competing transit app Moovit. "Apple has something that few companies have - simplicity in design mixed with high doses of pragmatism and practicality."

Apple's significant investment in fixing Maps underscores how important maps and related services are to tech companies. Location is key to helping phone users find restaurants and shops, discover things to do and just get around. It's also big business, as app makers tap into the core mapping functions of phones to direct people in helpful ways and sometimes offer them bargains based on where they're standing.

The quick turnaround also demonstrates how easily companies like Apple can steer people to their own services. Google Maps and various third-party apps offer many features that Apple

Maps lacks, yet Apple cleverly turned user inertia to its advantage. Many people use Apple Maps just because it comes with the phone. Even if you've taken the trouble to download a competing app, other iPhone services such as Siri and Mail will invariably take you to Apple Maps.

Without the ability to steer users this way, Apple "would not be in the position they are in," IDC analyst John Jackson said. "Not that they aren't improving the experience, but this helps the cause."

Apple says its mapping service is now used more than three times as often as its next leading competitor on iPhones and iPads, with more than 5 billion map-related requests each week. Research firm comScore says Apple has a modest lead over Google on iPhones in the U.S., though comScore measures how many people use a service in a given month rather than how often.

Google still dominates among all U.S. smartphones, though, in part because Apple Maps isn't available on Google's Android system, which is more prevalent than iPhones. In October, Google Maps had more than twice as many smartphone users as Apple Maps. Much like Apple, Google benefits as the default on Android.

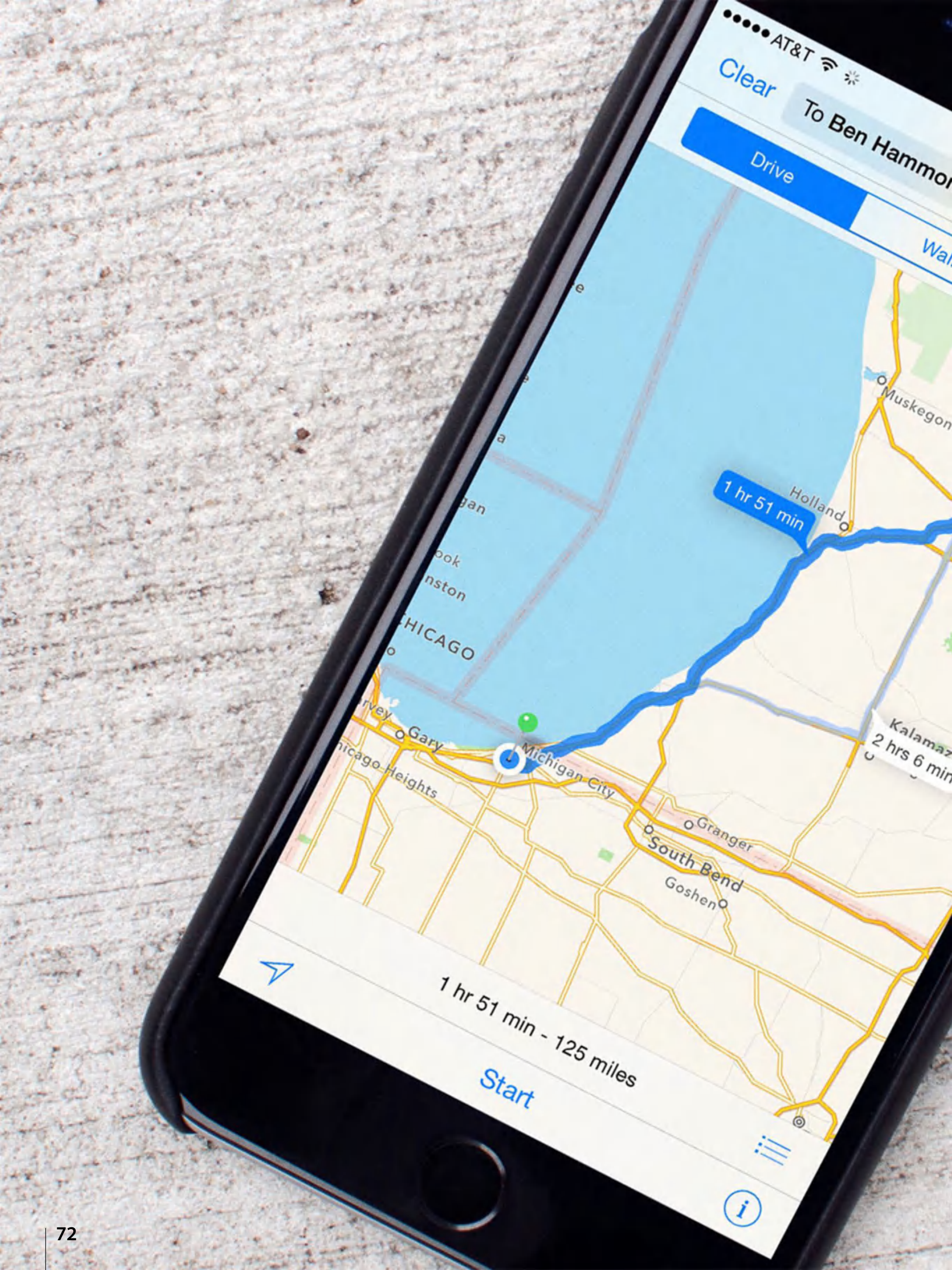
For years, Google provided the default mapping service on iPhones. That changed as more people relied on turn-by-turn voice navigation with automatic rerouting, a feature Google offered only on Android. Apple built its own service from scratch and knocked Google Maps off the iPhone's home screen.

Google's initial forays into voice navigation in 2009 had problems, too, including directing



Image: Martin Grossman




AT&T
Clear
To Ben Hammon
Drive
Wal
Muskegon
1 hr 51 min
Holland
Gary
Michigan City
Chicago Heights
Granger
South Bend
Goshen
Kalamaz
2 hrs 6 min
1 hr 51 min - 125 miles
Start

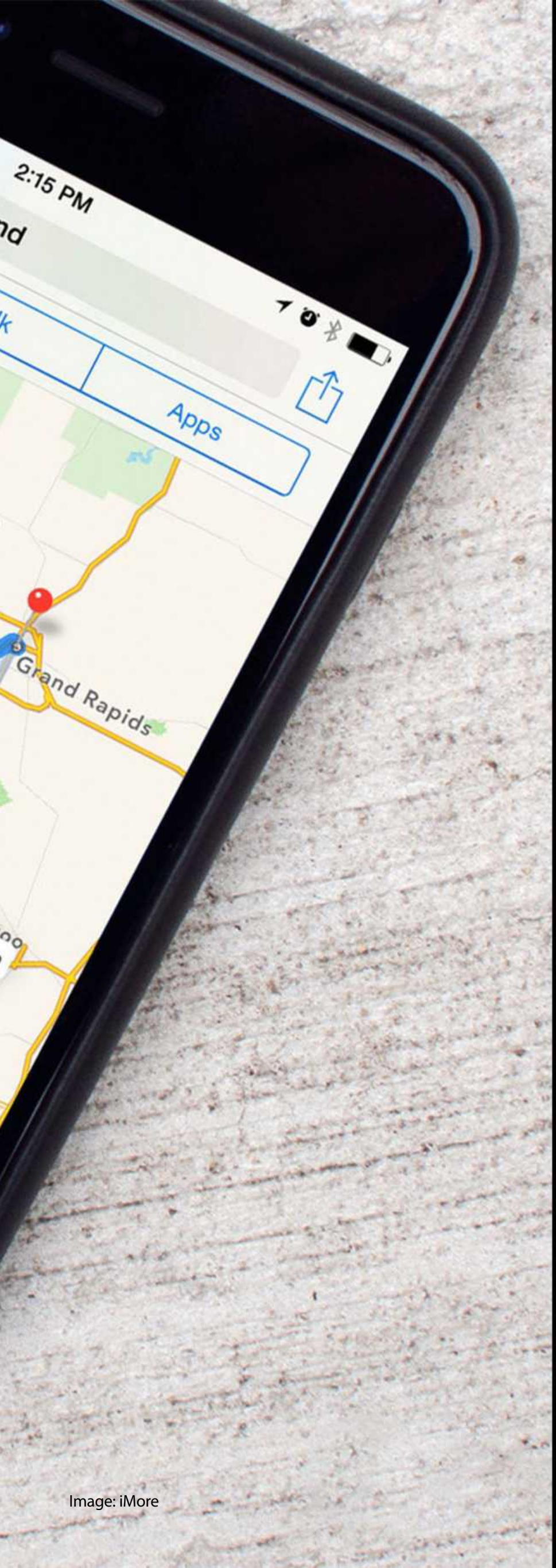


Image: iMore

motorists to left turns at no-turn intersections. But by 2012, Google Maps had improved significantly. By then, more people knew how a mapping service ought to work - and Apple's new offering fell short.

"I heard so many different horror stories that I was almost hesitant to try it," said Rick Ostopowicz, an iPhone owner in Catonsville, Maryland. "I remember once, it was taking me on a road that no longer existed."

CEO Tim Cook apologized and promised that Apple would "keep working non-stop" to deliver the best experience possible. Without much fanfare, the service gradually improved.

"We are fast learners and we are fast at fixing things," said Greg "Joz" Joswiak, an Apple vice president who oversees product marketing for iPhones and related services. "We learned the maps business incredibly fast."

Apple now gets data from more than 3,000 sources for business listings, traffic and other information. In adding transit, Apple sent teams to map out subway entrances and signs. That results in more precise walking directions, as stations can stretch for blocks and the center point used by some services isn't necessarily the closest. Apple also started sending out vehicles with sensors to map roads, similar to Google's longstanding practice.

By making Maps a core iPhone feature, Apple made it easier for outside developers to include mapping features in their apps. When you go to Yelp, you can find directions to a business with one tap. When you go to the Starbucks app, you can see all the nearby stores.

On the flip side, the iPhone's Siri voice assistant leads direction requests straight to Apple Maps, as does tapping on an address in Mail and other apps. With that integration, users like Ostopowicz no longer hesitate. The default behavior isn't just a competitive advantage for Apple; it's a convenience for many users.

But default settings mean nothing if the experience isn't good - as it most definitely wasn't three years ago. Kristi Denton, an iPhone user in Austin, Texas, said that after getting bad directions with Apple Maps long ago, she has gone as far as to copy addresses and paste them into Google to avoid the default Apple service.

Lots of users, though, have returned. And many new iPhone users never experienced Maps at its worst.

Google Maps, of course, has also been improving. Last month, Google started letting motorists store mapping data on their phones so they can look up businesses and directions even when cellular service is spotty. It's available on Android now and coming to iPhones soon.


Destinations
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ETA
33
min
8.2
mi
No
Yes
Guidance
M4
M4
A316
A3
Richmond Park
15:15
3G
Pioneer


Search
W 46th St
Theater District
- Times Square



Google also has mapped such indoor venues as shopping malls and faraway lands as the Galapagos Islands. Google has better search tools for landmarks and business listings and offers transit maps for more regions than Apple. Google also provides biking directions and options to exclude highways and toll roads from driving directions.

Third-party apps, meanwhile, have their own innovations. Waze - now owned by Google - is a popular app for motorists to share traffic information and avoid jams. Moovit is better than both Google and Apple at factoring in temporary service changes in mass transit, while Citymapper offers suggestions on whether to board the front, middle or back of a train.

Apple says it's not done improving Maps.

But ultimately, Apple Maps doesn't need to be the best. It just needs to be good enough that its users won't look for something else.

SOCIAL MEDIA, THE NEW MEGAPHONE FOR VIOLENT PERPETRATORS



Tashfeen Malik, the woman involved in this week's Southern California mass shooting, has another claim to notoriety: She's the latest in a growing line of extremists and disturbed killers who have used social media to punctuate their horrific violence.


media
Ctrl

A Facebook official said Friday that Malik, using an alias, praised the Islamic State group in a Facebook post shortly before - or during - the attack. Malik's posting echoes similar bids for attention by violent perpetrators, including a disgruntled Virginia broadcaster who recorded himself shooting two co-workers and then posted the video online and a Florida man who killed his wife and shared a photo of her body on social media.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media companies do their best to block or remove posts that glorify violence. But experts say it's an uphill battle, and the advent of new services that let people stream live video from any event will only make the task more challenging.

"Now everyone has the opportunity to talk to a larger audience," said Karen North, a professor of digital social media at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School. "If you commit an act and you want people to know about it, you now have a way to promote it."

Social media didn't invent extremist violence. But the Islamic State and similar groups have become deft at using social media to spread their message, both to recruit followers and to threaten their perceived enemies. "They can rapidly and easily identify others who share their beliefs," said Marcus Thomas, a former assistant director of the FBI's operational technology division.

Like many young adults, the 27-year-old Malik and her 28-year-old husband, Syed Farook, seemed comfortable with social media. A U.S. intelligence official said Farook had been in contact with known Islamic extremists online.

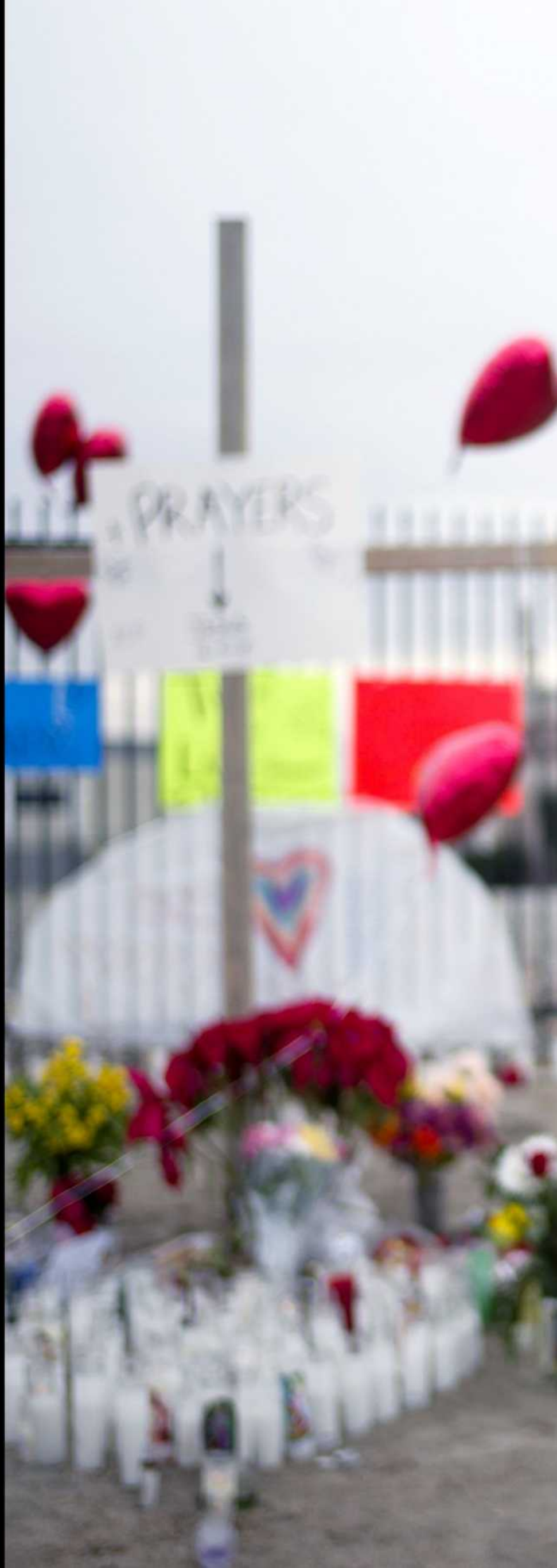


Image: Jae C. Hong

But there is no sign anyone from the Islamic State communicated with Malik or provided any guidance for the attack on a San Bernardino social service center, which left 14 people dead and 21 wounded.

YouTube, Twitter and other online services use automated software to help detect posts that violate their terms of service, including those that depict or encourage violence. They also encourage users to report such material, so it can be reviewed and removed.

Facebook declined comment Friday. But the page containing statements posted by the woman involved in this week's San Bernardino shootings was taken down. Malik and her husband, Syed Farook, died hours after the attack in a gun battle with police.

The social network has done "a fairly good job of making sure that users understand" that posts or videos glorifying violence will be taken down, said Stephen Balkam, head of the nonprofit Family Online Safety Institute, which works with Facebook and other sites to promote safe practices for children.

Still, he cautioned: "All the policies in the world won't help" unless companies also devote staff and resources to enforcing them. Even then, he said, it's not always easy to determine whether taking something down is the right thing to do.

Two years ago, Balkam publicly criticized Facebook when the giant social network reversed its own decision to take down a graphic video of a masked man beheading a woman. In that case, Facebook said it decided to allow the video because users were sharing it as a way of condemning the violence attributed to Mexican



Image: Chris Carlson


delete
return
security
alt
option
control



drug gangs. But the company eventually concluded the post was too offensive and removed it again.

Another problem: Violent posts can resurface even after they are taken down. When a fired TV reporter with a grudge killed two former co-workers in Virginia over the summer, he videotaped his own actions and then uploaded the clip to Facebook. The company took it down, but not before someone else had copied it and re-posted it on other sites, North said.

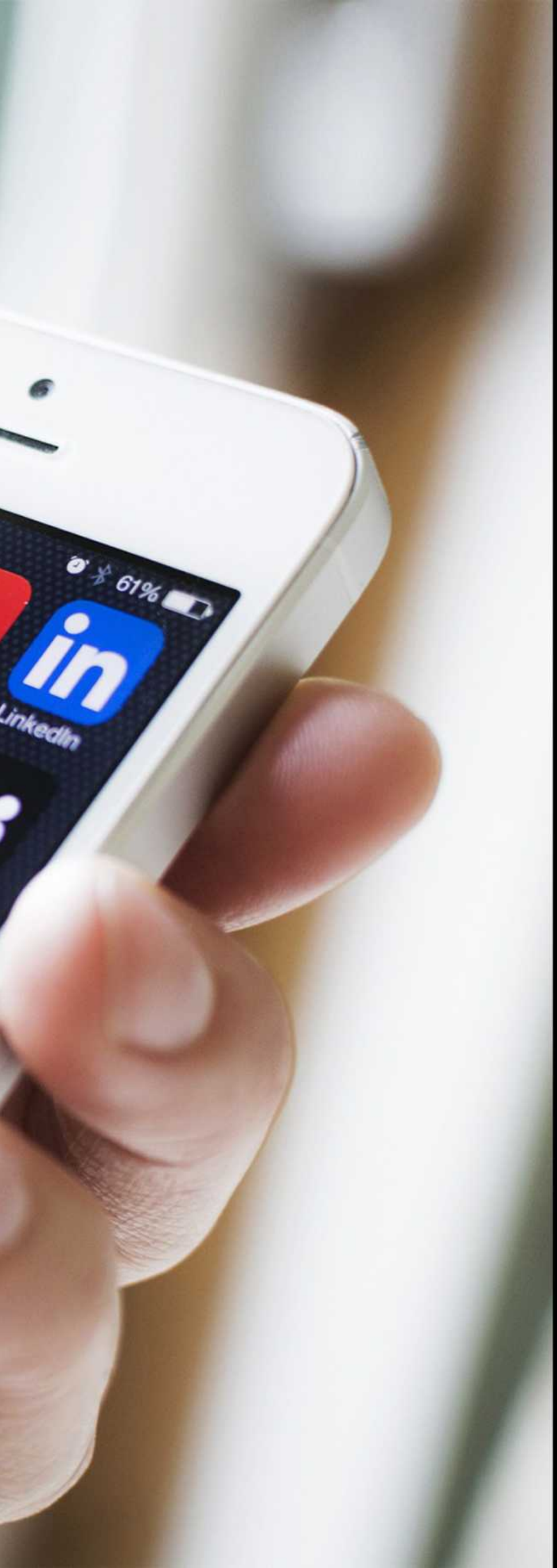
Facebook explicitly bans content being shared by "dangerous organizations" engaged in terrorist activity or organized crime. But even that requires a judgment call, because not everyone around the world defines terrorism in the same way, said David Greene, civil liberties director for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group.

"Most of these areas are more gray than black or white, and that can put these companies in a very difficult position," Greene said.

Lawmakers in the U.S. Senate recently considered a bill that would require social media companies to report any "terrorist activity" they found on their site to government authorities. Opponents questioned whether private companies were qualified to decide what constitutes terrorist activity. Tech representatives also warned the bill would have resulted in excessive reports to law enforcement and an overload of unhelpful data. The provision was later dropped.

Given the pervasiveness of social media, it's perhaps no surprise that some criminals have posted evidence of their own acts. Authorities


T-Mobile
10:29
Facebook
Twitter
Google+
Pinterest
Instagram
Tumblr
Myspace
Flickr
MeetUp
Vimeo
Viber



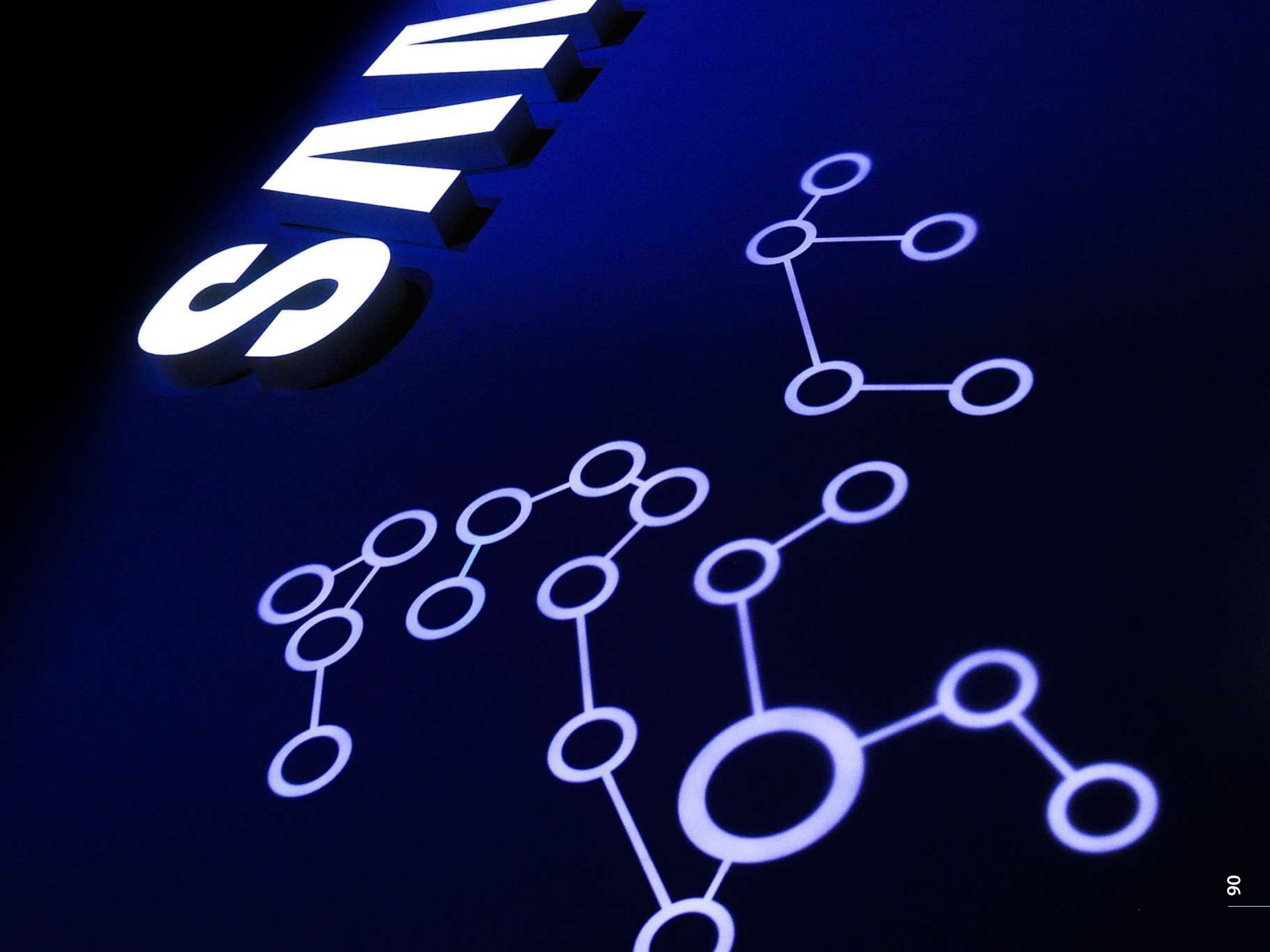
say teenagers in Illinois, Michigan and California have posted clips of themselves committing rape and assault - apparently to brag to their friends. Law enforcement officials say Florida resident Derek Medina posted a photo of his wife's body on Facebook with a note accusing her of abusing him. He was convicted of second-degree murder this year.

Dealing with these problems is inherent for any social network, said Brian Blau, a tech analyst with Gartner. "They are in the business of connecting people and, unfortunately, there are a lot of terrible people in the world."

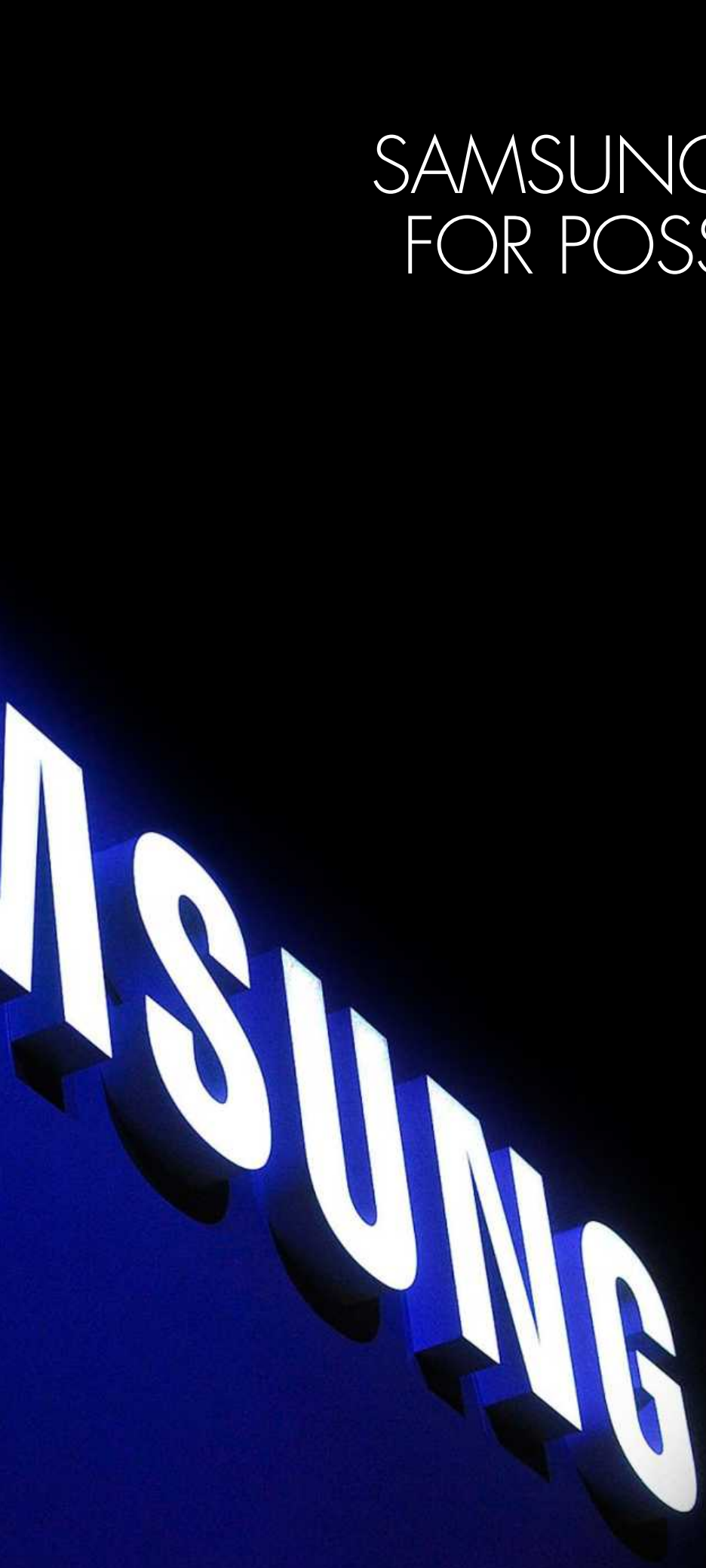
And with the advent of live-streaming apps like Meerkat and Twitter's Periscope service, safety advocates like Balkam worry that someone will use them to broadcast violence as it occurs. Facebook is also testing a similar service, which lets anyone broadcast live smartphone video to the world.

That will up the ante for social media companies, which will need to expand their systems for users to report violent content as it's streaming, as well as their ability to respond.

"We're talking in real time, stuff that you broadcast will have to be reported and taken down in a matter of seconds or minutes," Balkam said.



SAMSUNG EXECS INVESTIGATED FOR POSSIBLE INSIDER TRADING



South Korea's financial regulator said Friday it is investigating possible insider trading by Samsung executives related to a contentious takeover deal.

Kim Hongsik, director of the capital markets investigation unit at the Financial Services Commission, said South Korea's stock exchange reported the suspected insider trading or share manipulation.

South Korea's Yonhap News reported that nine Samsung executives purchased as much as 50 billion won ($43 million) of Cheil Industries stock before Samsung announced a deal to combine Cheil and another Samsung company in May.

Shares of Cheil, which has members of Samsung's founding Lee family as majority shareholders, surged after the announcement.



Kim said the investigation was related to the deal but declined to discuss other details because the matter was under investigation.

In a statement, Samsung described the investigation as being in its "early stage."

The Cheil Industries and Samsung C&T deal was contested by some shareholders of Samsung C&T who questioned its fairness.

Samsung C&T narrowly won a shareholder vote in July, allowing the transaction to go ahead. The combined entity has Samsung Electronics' vice chairman Lee Jae-yong as the majority shareholder giving him effective control of its 4 percent stake in Samsung Electronics, the Samsung conglomerate's crown jewel.

The most outspoken opponent of the deal was U.S. hedge fund Elliott Associates, which eventually lost its legal fight to stop Samsung from combining the two companies.

Elliott argued the takeover unfairly benefited Samsung's founding family and other shareholders in Cheil at the cost of shareholders in Samsung C&T.

The fight between Elliott and Samsung drew international attention as Samsung's all-out campaign was at one point criticized by Jewish organizations for depicting Elliott's founder as a ravenous, big-beaked vulture.

‘WALKING DEAD’ EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SINKS TEETH INTO VR



While experimenting with virtual reality for his latest project, “The Walking Dead” executive producer David Alpert and his crew relied on a very old-school form of technology when filming in 360 degrees: the hidey-hole.

“The assistant director would go around and say, ‘OK. Everyone, get in your hidey-hole!’“ said Alpert, who is also president of Skybound Entertainment. “Everyone in the camera

Image: HONS

department would look around and check if you could see them. If they could, they'd say, 'You need a new hidey-hole!' "

Being outside the view of cameras capturing every angle was just one of the many challenges that Alpert uncovered while working on "Gone," a live-action episodic VR series produced for Samsung's Milk VR service. The first installment of the 11-part mystery debuts Dec. 8.

"Gone" explores what happens when a child goes missing. The story unfolds from a main 360-degree perspective. At certain points throughout "Gone," viewers are able to zoom in on clues using the touchpad on the side of Samsung's Gear VR headset, which utilizes Samsung smartphones as a display device.

"The Walking Dead" fans will have to wait for a VR experience based on the franchise. Alpert noted that modern VR is still evolving and that he wanted to first produce an original story in VR before tackling zombies in the immersive medium.

"In the beginning when TV came out, people started just by putting radio on TV," he said. "Then, when the Internet came, people said, 'Let's put TV on the Internet.' It takes a while to find that native medium. I don't think the best thing to do is to take an established brand and just plop it in VR."

This story has been corrected to show that there are 11 installments of "Gone" and that it debuts Dec. 8.

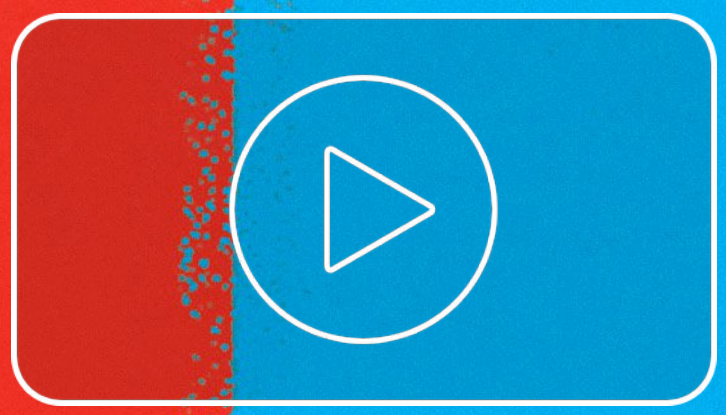
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iTunes

Review





Trailer

Movies & TV Shows





iTunes Preview

by The Beatles
Genre: Music Feature Films
Released: 2015
Price: $26.99

★★★★★
34 Ratings

The Beatles: 1+

A collection of all of the legendary band's 27 #1 UK and US single videos, 23 alternate versions, and rarely seen and newly restored movies. A must for any Beatles obsessive.

FIVE FACTS:

1. The Beatles are the best-selling music artists in the United States, according to the RIAA, and are often considered to be the best-selling band in history, with estimated sales of over 600 million records worldwide.

2. This DVD is a companion of the 1 compilation album, released on the 30th anniversary of the band's breakup on 13th November 2000.

3. Despite only being active for 10 years, the band has received 16 major awards out of 35 nominations, including "World's Best Selling Pop Rock Artists/Group" from the World Music Awards.

4. 1 achieved the record for debuting at the top of the most national charts ever, reaching No. 1 in over 35 countries.

5. The band has had a significant impact on popular culture, being referenced in everything from The Simpsons, to various children's cartoons, to having their very own Rock Band video game.

See more in iTunes





Band member Ringo's commentary of the DVD

Minions

The smash-hit spinoff/ prequel to the Despicable Me movies is a rip-roaring comedy adventure, and a must-see for fans of the original movie. Featuring stars such as Sandra Bullock, Steve Coogan, and Jennifer Saunders, this movie tells of the mischievous yellow creature's origin, their evolution over time, and a worldwide adventure that leads to the beginning of Despicable Me.

FIVE FACTS:

1. The movie is the 10th highest-grossing film of all time, the 2nd highest-grossing animated film, and the highest grossing non-Disney animated film.

2. Minions is narrated by Geoffery Rush, an internationally renowned Australian actor and movie producer, who is known for his work on Finding Nemo, the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, and The King's Speech.

3. The original Despicable Me movie was the 3rd biggest opening gross for an animated film in 2010 ($56.3 million), falling behind Toy Story 3 and Shrek Forever After.

4. Despicable Me spawned a monumental franchise, which includes several short films, video games, books, and even theme park attractions.

5. The Despicable Me franchise is the third highest-grossing animated film franchise behind Shrek and Ice Age.



iTunes **Preview**

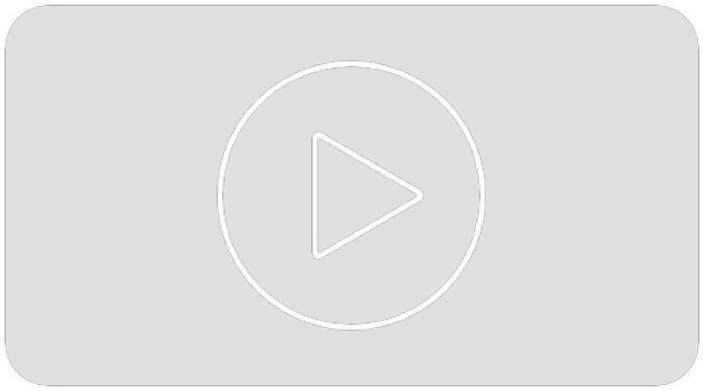
by Pierre Coffin & Kyle Balda
Genre: Kids & Family
Released: 2015
Price: $19 .99

★★★★★
746 Ratings

Rotten **Tomatoes**
CERTIFIED FRESH
55%



Trailer



Interview with cast member



iTunes

Review

Music



iTunes **Preview**

Genre: Alternative
Released: Dec 04, 2015
11 Songs + digital booklet
Price: $9.99

★★★★★
2308 Ratings



The first single released from the album, "Adventure of a lifetime"

A Head Full of Dreams

Coldplay

The seventh studio album from British rock band Coldplay is just as anthemic and as uplifting as the rest, and features guest performances from Beyonce, Noel Gallagher, and even President Barack Obama.

FIVE FACTS:

1. The band are known for their charity work, which ranges from fundraising concerts, to donating 10% of all of their profits to charity.

2. During their two-decade long career, the band has received 59 awards from 191 nominations.

3. The band has collaborated with a host of legendary artists in the past, including Brian Eno.

4. Coldplay recorded Atlas for the soundtrack of the second movie of The Hunger Games series.

5. The band are protective of how their music is used in the media, preferring to support charitable companies, and turning down multi-million contracts from brands such as Gatorade, Diet Coke, and Gap.

See more in iTunes



A recent interview with the band

Tusk (deluxe) [Remastered]

Fleetwood Mac



iTunes **Preview**

Genre: Rock
Released: Dec 04, 2015
84 Songs, over 5 discs
Price: $39.99

★★★★★
21 Ratings

A live album of one of the Grateful Dead's last ever live shows, to celebrate their 50th anniversary as a band. This album was recorded from their legendary July 5th concert at Soldier Field in Chicago.

FIVE FACTS:

1. The band's 11th album, Rumours, is the eight highest-selling album of all time.

2. Vocalist Stevie Nicks appeared in the third season of the popular TV show American Horror Story, as a fictional version of herself.

3. Their recent On with the Show tour placed 2nd on Pollstar's "Top 100 Worldwide Tours", with a total gross of $166.1 million.

4. Forming in 1967, the band were originally a blues act, before a transitional period led to mainstream success in the mid-seventies.

5. Drummer Mick Fleetwood is the only remaining original member of the band.



The first single released from the album

DELUXE

FLEETWOOD M

tusk





Second single from the album



KENDRICK THE KING: RAPPER LEADS GRAMMYS WITH 11 NOMINATIONS

Kendrick Lamar is the king of the Grammys: The rapper is the leading nominee for the 2016 awards with 11, including album of the year for "To Pimp a Butterfly" and song of the year for "Alright."

Lamar, who won two Grammys earlier this year, is followed by Taylor Swift and the Weeknd, who each earned seven nominations, including album of the year. "Butterfly," "1989" and "Beauty Behind the Madness" will battle country singer-songwriter Chris Stapleton's "Traveller" and rock group Alabama Shakes' "Sound & Color" for the top prize.

Lamar's "Alright" and Swift's "Blank Space" are nominated for song of the year, a songwriter's award. Other nominees include Wiz Khalifa and Charlie Puth's tribute to actor Paul Walker, "See You Again," Ed Sheeran's slow burner "Thinking out Loud" and Little Big Town's semi-controversial hit, "Girl Crush," written by Lori McKenna, Hillary Lindsey and Liz Rose.

"Thinking out Loud" and "Blank Space," which reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, are also nominated for record of the year, pitting the songs against No.1 hits that include Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars' "Uptown Funk" and the Weeknd's "Can't Feel My Face," as well as a wild card: "Really Love" from R&B singer D'Angelo and the Vanguard.

"There's a broad spectrum and certainly it shows there's been quite a bit of wonderful and excellent recordings in the last year," Recording Academy CEO Neil Portow said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Lamar's other nominations include best rap album for "Butterfly," rap performance for "Alright," pop duo/group performance for "Bad Blood" with Swift and dance recording "Never Catch Me" with Flying Lotus. He's nominated twice for both best rap song with "Alright" and for co-writing Kanye West's "All Day," as well as best music video for "Alright" and "Bad Blood."

"It's a testimony to his artistry," Portnow said of Lamar. "He's someone that's very serious about his art and about his craft, and has been working it for quite some time. And this is one of those instances where the work pays off."

Swift, who won album of the year with "Fearless" in 2010 and earned a nomination in the top category with "Red," is also up for best pop vocal album for her top-selling "1989" and pop solo performance for "Blank Space." The Weeknd's nominations include best pop solo performance for "Can't Feel My Face" and urban contemporary album for "Beauty." His hit from the "Fifty Shades of Grey" soundtrack - "Earned It" - garnered nominations for best R&B performance, R&B song and song written for visual media.

The film's soundtrack, which also featured the Ellie Goulding hit "Love Me Like You Do," is up for best compilation soundtrack for visual media along with "Empire: Season 1," which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts earlier this year.

More than 21,000 submissions were entered for the 83 Grammy categories, with the first round of votes due by Nov. 4 - the day the Country Music Association Awards aired and Stapleton cleaned house and turned in a memorable

performance alongside Justin Timberlake. In addition to album of the year, Stapleton's "Traveller" is nominated for best country album, country song and country solo performance.

Garth Brooks, who marked a comeback after 13 years last year, was surprisingly shut out of the country categories. Despite success with tours, albums and singles, Luke Bryan was also snubbed and has yet to earn a Grammy nomination.

This year's best country album contenders include Little Big Town's "Pain Killer," Kacey Musgraves' "Pageant Material," Ashley Monroe's "The Blade" and "Montevallo" by singer-songwriter Sam Hunt, who is also nominated for best new artist. Other nominees include "All About That Bass" performer Meghan Trainor, big-voiced singer Tori Kelly, Australian singer-songwriter Courtney Barnett and rock musician James Bay, who is also nominated for best rock album and rock song.

Rapper Drake scored five nominations, including best rap album for "If You're Reading This It's Too Late," pitting him against Lamar, Dr. Dre's "Compton," Nicki Minaj's "The Pinkprint" and J. Cole's "2014 Forest Hills Drive."

Alabama Shakes, fronted by singer Brittany Howard, debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts with "Sound & Color" earlier this year, and the album was met with critical acclaim - much like the band's 2012 debut, "Boys & Girls." Their four nominations include best alternative music album as well as best rock performance and song for "Don't Wanna Fight."

Pharrell and West are also nominated for four awards, including album of the year for producing

songs on Lamar's album. West's nominations include best rap song and rap performance for "All Day," which featured Paul McCartney and earned the icon two rap nominations.

Justin Bieber - who marked a comeback this year with the hits "Sorry" and "What Do You Mean" - is nominated for best dance recording for his other hit, "Where Are U Now" with Skrillex and Diplo. Both Bieber and Adele's new albums will qualify for Grammy nominations next year since they were released after Sept. 30 - the final day for eligibility this year.

Other notable nominees include married duo Joey + Rory for best country duo/group performance (they recently announced Joey is ending her cancer treatment after a recurrence of tumors); actress Amy Poehler with her first Grammy nomination for best spoken word album for "Yes Please"; and actor Seth MacFarlane for best traditional pop vocal album, competing with albums from Bob Dylan, Tony Bennett, Barry Manilow and Josh Groban.

Saxophonist Jimmy Greene, the father of one of the children killed in the Sandy Hook school shooting, earned two nominations for an album inspired by his late daughter Ana Márquez-Greene.

The 58th Grammys will air live on February 15, 2016, from the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Voting for the second round, completed by mail and starting next week, ends on January 15, 2016.

Online:
https://www.grammy.com/

‘HUNGER GAMES’ FINALE FENDS OFF SPOOKY ‘KRAMPUS’ FLICK

The “Hunger Games” finale spoiled an early Christmas for the holiday horror comedy “Krampus” to maintain its top spot at the North American box office for the third week running.

The Jennifer Lawrence-led film took in an estimated $18.6 million in the U.S. and Canada, bringing its domestic total to $227 million, according to Rentrak estimates Sunday.

The anti-Santa Claus thriller from Universal, the only film to debut in the top 10 this week, brought in $16 million.

The normally slow weekend following Thanksgiving was up 26 percent from a year ago thanks to the fresh fodder from Universal, which slipped in between the release of two huge franchise movies- “The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2,” and “Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens,” which is due out Dec. 18.



"Even though it's horror at its base, you needed to have enough time for the film to open and lead up to Christmas," said Nicholas Carpou, Universal Pictures' president of domestic distribution. "Being the only wide commercial release on this date really did wonders for this film."

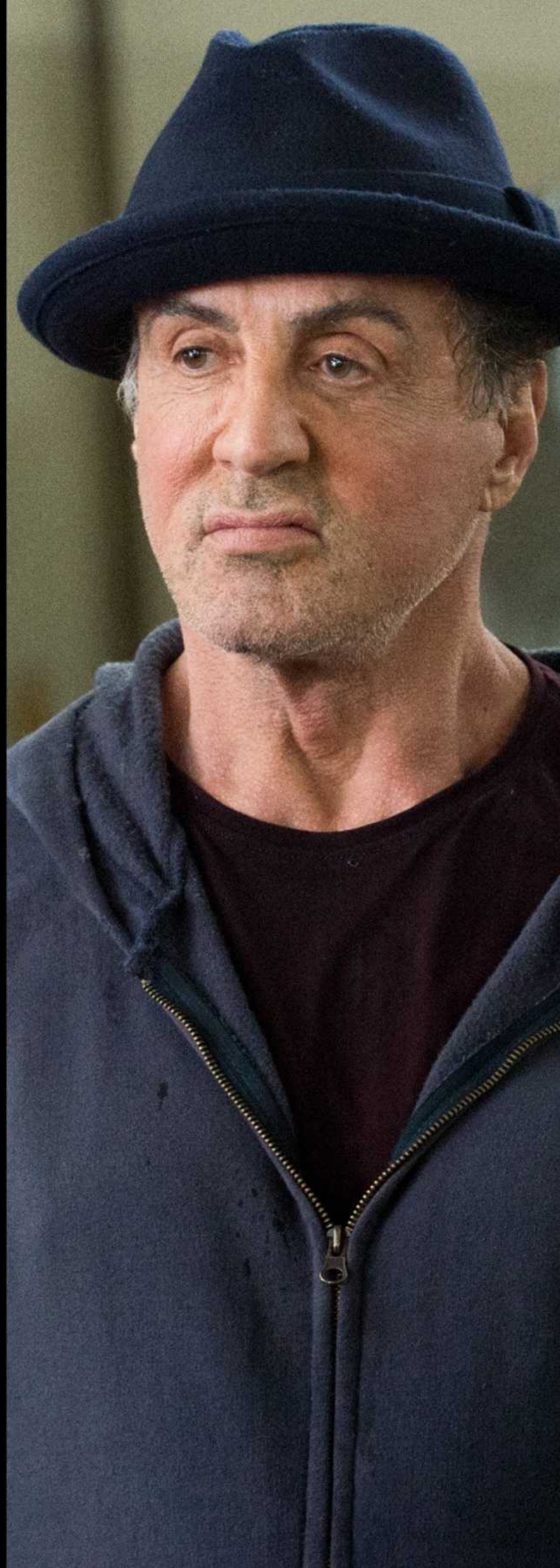
Modestly budgeted for under $15 million, "Krampus" is likely to add to the profits of what has been a record year for Universal following the release of movies like "Jurassic World," "Furious 7," and "Minions."

Meanwhile, the final movie installment for bow-wielding Katniss pushed past $500 million worldwide, another hit for Lionsgate, which has staked its claim on the young adult market. It hopes to keep rolling with its franchise film strategy with "Allegiant," the third film in the "Divergent" series due out in March.

"Creed," the boxing film where Sylvester Stallone reprises his role as Rocky Balboa, came third, and the Disney/Pixar animated tale "The Good Dinosaur" came fourth. Each had around $15.5 million in ticket sales.

Overall ticket sales are running 4 percent ahead of last year and are on track to top $11 billion in the U.S. and Canada for the first time, said Rentrak's senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian.

Dergarabedian says it remains to be seen whether the global excitement around J.J. Abrams' "Star Wars" will drown out a bevy of other options coming out later this year. That ranges from director Alejandro Inarritu's "The Revenant" to the Amy Poehler and Tina Fey-led comedy, "Sisters," which has knowingly marketed its film with a "Star Wars" parody trailer and the hashtag #youcanseethemboth.





2



Among other films competing for attention in the coming weeks are: "Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip," the Will Smith-led football movie "Concussion," and "Joy," an underdog tale that reunites stars Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper with "American Hustle" director David O. Russell.

"Hopefully the rising tide of 'Star Wars' will raise all movies," Dergarabedian said.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Rentrak. Where available, the latest international numbers for Friday through Sunday are also included. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. *"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2," $18.6 million ($32.4 million international).*

2. *"Krampus," $16.0 million ($3.3 million international).*

3. *"Creed," $15.5 million ($1.4 million international).*

4. *"The Good Dinosaur," $15.5 million ($19.4 million international).*

5. *"Spectre," $5.4 million ($23 million international).*





10



6. *"The Night Before," $4.9 million.*

7. *"The Peanuts Movie," $3.5 million ($2.2 million international).*

8. *"Spotlight," $2.9 million.*

9. *"Brooklyn," $2.4 million.*

10. *"Secret In Their Eyes," $2.0 million.*



2



Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at international theaters (excluding the U.S. and Canada), according to Rentrak:

1. *“The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2,” $32.4 million.*

2. *“Spectre,” $23 million.*

3. *“The Good Dinosaur,” $19.4 million.*

4. *“In The Heart Of The Sea,” $17.1 million.*

5. *“The Martian,” $13.5 million.*




6
10



6. *“Point Break,” $12 million.*

7. *“Fall In Love Like A Star,” $11 million.*

8. *“Bridge of Spies,” $10 million.*

9. *“Inside Men,” $6.6 million.*

10. *“Victor Frankenstein,” $5 million.*

Universal and Focus are owned by NBC Universal, a unit of Comcast Corp.; Sony, Columbia, Sony Screen Gems and Sony Pictures Classics are units of Sony Corp.; Paramount is owned by Viacom Inc.; Disney, Pixar and Marvel are owned by The Walt Disney Co.; Miramax is owned by Filmyard Holdings LLC; 20th Century Fox and Fox Searchlight are owned by 21st Century Fox; Warner Bros. and New Line are units of Time Warner Inc.; MGM is owned by a group of former creditors including Highland Capital, Anchorage Advisors and Carl Icahn; Lionsgate is owned by Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.; IFC is owned by AMC Networks Inc.; Rogue is owned by Relativity Media LLC.

CHRIS HEMSWORTH ON FAME, THOR AND 'HEART OF THE SEA'





Hosting "Saturday Night Live" earlier this year, Chris Hemsworth exaggerated his swift ascent in Hollywood: "If a jacked Australian with a perfect face can make it, anyone can," he said in a mock "American Express" ad.

Hemsworth, the 32-year-old Australian actor known the world over as Thor, appears as if perfectly chiseled out of movie star granite. But whatever his considerable natural gifts, Hemsworth has proven an interesting actor inclined to use his powerful screen presence in roles that both exalt it and upend it.

In "In the Heart of the Sea," which opens Friday, he reteams with Ron Howard, who directed him in "Rush," the 2013 movie that yielded Hemsworth's most confident starring performance as the Formula One driver James Hunt.

In "Heart of the Sea," a recounting of the plight of the Essex (the cursed whaling ship that inspired Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick"), Hemsworth plays the swashbuckling first mate. Shipwrecked by a mammoth sperm whale, Hemsworth's heroic seaman is humbled, left a gaunt survivor. (The actor shed considerable weight for the role.)

It's the kind of duality that defines Hemsworth: a hunk but a family man (he has three kids); an "Avengers" superhero but a talented comic actor. Along with his shirtless cameo in "Vacation" and playing the receptionist in the upcoming "Ghostbusters," he hosts "SNL" again on Saturday.

In a recent interview, Hemsworth discussed his new film, the box-office disappointment "Blackhat" and the stresses of being a Norse god.

AM: Do you ever feel any pressure to live up to Thor?

Hemsworth: You feel like you've tricked everyone successfully. I never felt big enough playing Thor. And then people talk about you like you're 9-foot tall and 800 pounds. I'm well aware of the illusion. There's not a second where I go: Yeah, I'm a god.

AM: Are you aware there's another Thor in New York right now? It's the nickname of the hard-throwing New York Mets pitcher Noah Syndergaard.

Hemsworth: (Laughs) I'll look him up! I think he's far more godlike than me.

AM: Your first taste of fame didn't come in Hollywood but in Australia as a star on the long-running Australian soap opera "Home and Away."

Hemsworth: I did get the recognition of: You're famous. I wouldn't say it came with a whole lot of respect, though. I wasn't considered an artist or actor. But, you know, it's a soap opera. That's kind of the universal opinion people have on that. I mean, I have a huge amount of respect for the show. I think it's harder than just about anything. It's 20 scenes a day and they're not the greatest scripts at times.

AM: How did that prepare you for Hollywood?

Hemsworth: : I walked the gamut of what you can experience in this business in that period, and no one was paying any great attention -- which was awesome. By the time I got to Hollywood, it was like: Now it's time to work, and I know why I love it. I kind of got a chance to start again.

AM: The best scene of "Thor" must have been when Thor tries coffee for the first time, slams it on the floor and demands another.



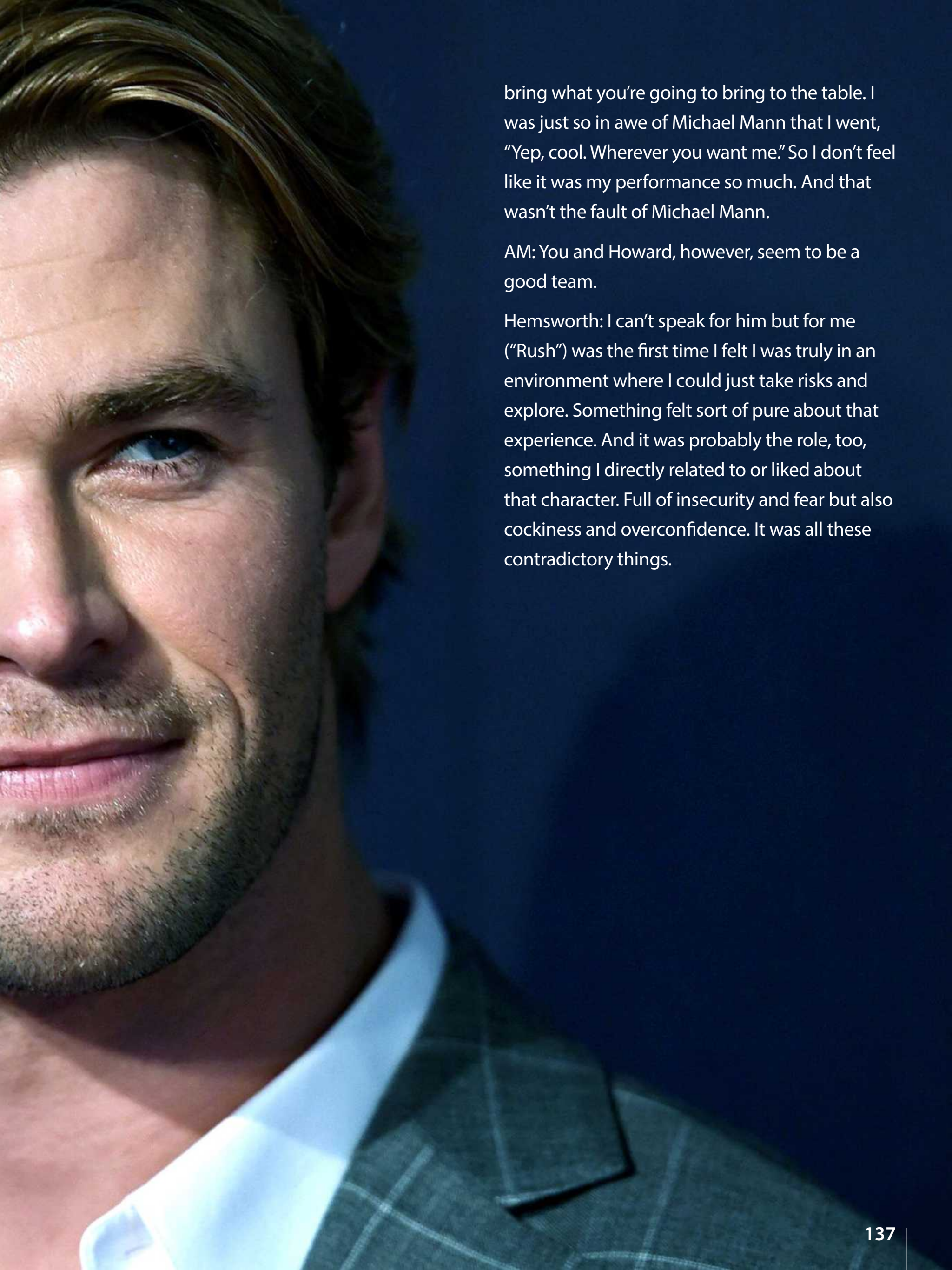


Hemsworth: It's funny, that's probably closer to me than the serious, gladiatorial-type Thor. I'd rather have fun with it. It comes easier. When doing Thor, those scenes where he (lowers voice) spoke like this and everything was grand and big, people thought: That's what he is. "Saturday Night Live" and "Vacation," as well, are good opportunities to go: Actually it's not.

AM: What was your experience on Michael Mann's cyber-crime thriller "Blackhat," which some critics defended but which flopped at the box office?

Hemsworth: Really hard, actually. I love Michael and it was great. But I do wish I had done more of what I truly wanted to do. I remember being so in awe of him that I said I would just do anything he said, regardless of whether I agreed with it. And that's a real danger because someone hires you because they want to you





bring what you're going to bring to the table. I was just so in awe of Michael Mann that I went, "Yep, cool. Wherever you want me." So I don't feel like it was my performance so much. And that wasn't the fault of Michael Mann.

AM: You and Howard, however, seem to be a good team.

Hemsworth: I can't speak for him but for me ("Rush") was the first time I felt I was truly in an environment where I could just take risks and explore. Something felt sort of pure about that experience. And it was probably the role, too, something I directly related to or liked about that character. Full of insecurity and fear but also cockiness and overconfidence. It was all these contradictory things.

REVIEW: 'CHI-RAQ' SOUNDTRACK HITS A FEW SOUR NOTES

Various Artists, Chi-Raq (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack) (RCA)

The soundtrack for Spike Lee's "Chi-Raq" aligns with the movie - a mish-mash of styles, time periods and characters; painful and solemn in some spots, and uncomfortably over-the-top in others. Like the film, the soundtrack captures a range of voices, each speaking to urgent issues, including gun violence, social inequality, and more.

And just like the movie, the soundtrack offers plenty to criticize.

"We're the only race that shoots and kills themselves," Kevon Carter sings on the sonically pleasing but factually incorrect "WGDB" (short for We Got to Do Better). The song begins with Kevon singing, "Everybody's talking about Brother Bill Cosby... (allegedly) drugging girls."

There's mention of public attention on the Drake vs. Meek Mill beef, with Kevon asking, "but where was the compassion for those murdered in Chicago?"

Then there's Chicagoan R. Kelly on "Put the Guns Down," featuring singer/rapper Tink. Over a catchy house music-influenced beat, Kelly sings about children being shot down in the street. But his suggestion "do your dance, get in your zone/ they can't take you out that" comes off as inappropriate and silly.

If listeners can stomach the painful bits, then skip past the songs not worth mentioning, they'll find a few gems, including the haunting "Desperately" by Chicago singer Sam Dew and two songs by inspirational artist Mali Music. The latter singer is good alongside Jhene Aiko on the island-y "Contradiction," but even better on the emotional "Sit Down for This," with its gripping narrative.

Jennifer Hudson pours her heart into "I Run," capturing the on-screen anguish she demonstrates in "Chi-Raq," and perhaps, letting us in on the real-life pain she felt following the 2008 shooting deaths of her mother, brother and nephew in Chicago.

Music from the "Chi-Raq" soundtrack, including songs from Nick Cannon, do their job in the movie. But on their own, the collection falls short.





IN WAR-TORN GAZA, A TINY HIGH-TECH SECTOR EMERGES

As a student graduating from computer college two years ago, Mohammed Qudih was dreading the "painful" unemployment in the Gaza Strip - a war-battered coastal territory where nearly half the population is without work.

Today, the 25-year-old engineer boasts about his company, its 20 full-time staff and the final check he is issuing to cover the $40,000 spent on designing and furnishing the office.

The firm, called Haweya for Information Technology, specializes in branding for new or restructuring businesses. Its name in Arabic means "identity."

"I was shocked by the painful work situation in Gaza; there were no jobs and getting a job is very, very difficult. That's where the idea came from," Qudih said, sitting behind a white laptop on his dark wooden desk.

It is a rare success story in Gaza, whose economy has been battered by an Israeli and Egyptian blockade and a 50-day war between Israel and the territory's Hamas rulers last year. Israel considers Hamas, an Islamic militant group committed to its destruction, to be a terrorist organization.

Qudih said the idea for his startup had been in his mind since he entered university in 2009. Five years later, Haweya saw light after receiving support from the Mobaderoon project. The program, which means "entrepreneurs" in Arabic, is administered by the Palestinian Welfare Association, a development agency, with funding from the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

In all, there are now four business incubators and accelerators in Gaza, offering advice and financial assistance to aspiring high-tech entrepreneurs. One is run by the U.S. charity Mercy Corps.

"We can say it's a trend," said Yousef Elhallaq of Mobaderoon. "It has been an actual phenomenon in Gaza and the interest in it, in part, is driven by unemployment."

Haweya is one of dozens of startups that have survived despite the conflicts, the blockade and Gaza's run-down infrastructure. At best, they get eight hours of electricity on any given



Image: Khalil Hamra

day. The Israeli-Egyptian blockade restricts the movement of people in and out of Gaza, and the territory is still recovering from the damage of last year's war.

The closure has been a driving force for the entrepreneurs, who are forced to innovate in order to confront the unique challenges they face. Gaza startups are currently developing cheaper, local alternatives to expensive products like 3-D printers and stabilizers for video cameras.



In May, the World Bank put the unemployment rate in Gaza at 43 percent and warned the economy is on the "verge of collapse" due to the war, blockade and poor governance.

Hamas has ruled Gaza since driving out forces loyal to the Western-backed Palestinian Authority in 2007. Repeated attempts at reconciliation have failed, and Gaza now hosts two bloated and cash-strapped bureaucracies loyal to rival factions. The internationally shunned Hamas has struggled to pay its staff, and has not hired anyone in the public sector in the past two years.

The Mobaderoon program has created about 100 jobs so far, a small number in a territory of 1.8 million people. Still, it is a notable achievement, especially in light of the public sector turmoil.

In November, young entrepreneurs gathered at a hall co-managed by the Islamic University's Business and Technology Incubator, auditioning to be among 20 startups accepted into the third round of the Mobaderoon program.

Each successful startup is entitled to about $10,000 in cash, machines, consultation and support, according to Elhallaq, their supervisor.

In one of the few projects that don't employ information technology and communication,

Dalia Abu Tahoun and her colleagues offered visitors white cheese cubes on toothpicks. Their idea was to naturally fortify soft cheese with calcium and phytoestrogens to make the nutrients cheaply and easily available for women and children suffering from fragile bones.

On another desk, Ahmed al-Shuraffa, 22, showed off a project that allows smartphone users to take a 3-D tour of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The mosque, Islam's third holiest site, is a key Palestinian religious and national symbol.

Al-Shuraffa, like most Gazans his age, has never been to Jerusalem and he counts this as one of the main difficulties for his project. He relies on images and data provided by friends.

"Working in an environment and trying to recall it virtually in a place you have never visited, or which is difficult to imagine, is a big problem," he said.

Haweya offers event management as well as web, architecture and interior designs to local and international clients, many of them in the Arab Gulf. They remotely designed the logo and stage setup for the third International Forum for Humanitarian Action, which was held in Qatar in May.

The closure prevents them from signing more deals, and Qudih prays for the opening of the crossings to boost business. However, he is satisfied with what he has done so far.

"It's a beautiful feeling to reach a result, where the idea has become a reality and the dream has come true in Gaza's difficult circumstances," he said.



Image: Khalil Hamra

'THE WIZ' HELPS NBC TO A RATINGS WIN

NBC's winning streak in the television ratings hit two weeks, with a turnout of 11.5 million viewers for its live production of "The Wiz" helping the network on a night its ratings are usually low.

NBC also benefited from a strong showing for its special saluting the lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree in New York City, the Nielsen company said. A two-week winning streak may not seem like much, but these days CBS is rarely dislodged as television's most popular network.

The Christmas tree lighting reached 8 million viewers, but CBS' airing of the holiday chestnut "Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer" was seen by a million more people.

An estimated 46 million people watched President Barack Obama's Oval Office speech on terrorism on one of 12 different networks. A busy news week in the aftermath of the San Bernardino shootings helped Fox News Channel outrank all of the other cable networks for the second time this year.

NBC averaged 8.9 million viewers for the week in prime time. CBS had 8.4 million. Fox had a strong week with the Big Ten football championship and midseason finale of "Empire," and was third with 6.5 million viewers. ABC had 5.4 million, Univision had 1.9 million, the CW had 1.8 million, Telemundo had 1.6 million and ION Television had 1.3 million.

Fox News Channel averaged 2.7 million viewers in prime time, ESPN had 2.5 million, ABC Family had 2.4 million, Hallmark had 2.03 million and TBS had 1.73 million.

NBC's "Nightly News" topped the evening newscasts with an average of 9.8 million viewers. ABC's "World News Tonight" was second with 9 million and the "CBS Evening News" had 7.9 million viewers.

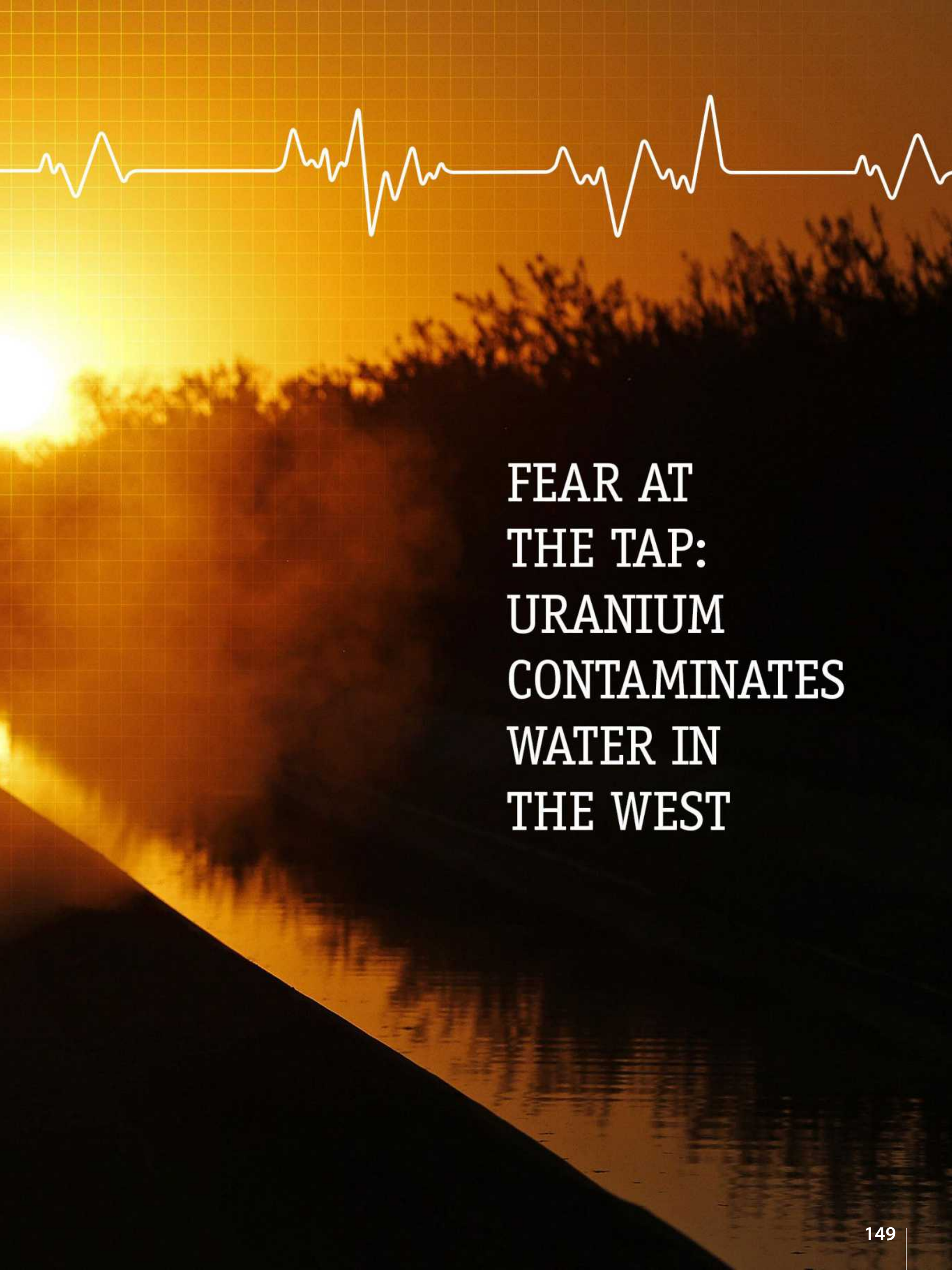
For the week of Nov. 30-Dec. 6, the top 10 shows, their networks and viewerships: NFL Football: Indianapolis at Pittsburgh, NBC, 19.19 million; NFL Football: Green Bay at Detroit, CBS, 17.85 million; "The OT," Fox, 16.76 million; "Sunday Night NFL Pre-Kick," NBC, 14.65 million; "The Voice" (Monday), NBC, 12.56 million; "The Voice" (Tuesday), NBC, 12.13 million; "Empire," Fox, 11.81 million; "The Wiz Live," NBC, 11.5 million; "NFL Pregame," CBS, 10.82 million; NFL Football: Baltimore at Cleveland, ESPN, 10.12 million.

ABC and ESPN are owned by The Walt Disney Co. CBS is owned by CBS Corp. CW is a joint venture of Warner Bros. Entertainment and CBS Corp. Fox is owned by 21st Century Fox. NBC and Telemundo are owned by Comcast Corp. ION Television is owned by ION Media Networks.

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http://www.nielsen.com



Image: AP Photo/John Locher



FEAR AT THE TAP: URANIUM CONTAMINATES WATER IN THE WEST

In a trailer park tucked among irrigated orchards that help make California's San Joaquin Valley the richest farm region in the world, 16-year-old Giselle Alvarez, one of the few English-speakers in the community of farmworkers, puzzles over the notices posted on front doors: There's a danger in their drinking water.

Uranium, the notices warn, tests at a level considered unsafe by federal and state standards. The law requires the park's owners to post the warnings. But they are awkwardly worded and in English, a language few of the park's dozens of Spanish-speaking families can read.

"It says you can drink the water - but if you drink the water over a period of time, you can get cancer," said Alvarez, whose working-class family has no choice but keep drinking and cooking with the tainted tap water daily, as they have since Alvarez was just learning to walk. "They really don't explain."

Uranium, the stuff of nuclear fuel for power plants and atom bombs, increasingly is showing in drinking water systems in major farming regions of the U.S. West - a naturally occurring but unexpected byproduct of irrigation, of drought, and of the overpumping of natural underground water reserves.

An Associated Press investigation in California's central farm valleys - along with the U.S. Central Plains, among the areas most affected - found authorities are doing little to inform the public at large of the growing risk.

That includes the one out of four families on private wells in this farm valley who, unknowingly, are drinking dangerous amounts of uranium, researchers determined this year





Image: AP Photo/John Locher



Image: AP Photo/ Brendan Smialowski

and last. Government authorities say long-term exposure to uranium can damage kidneys and raise cancer risks, and scientists say it can have other harmful effects.

In this swath of farmland, roughly 250 miles long and encompassing major cities, up to one in 10 public water systems have raw drinking water with uranium levels that exceed federal and state safety standards, the U.S. Geological Survey has found.

More broadly, nearly 2 million people in California's Central Valley and in the U.S. Midwest live within a half-mile of groundwater containing uranium over the safety standards, University of Nebraska researchers said in a study published in September.

Everything from state agencies to tiny rural schools are scrambling to deal with hundreds of tainted public wells - more regulated than private wells under safe-drinking-water laws.

That includes water wells at the Westport Elementary School, where 450 children from rural families study outside the Central California farm hub of Modesto.

At Westport's playground, schoolchildren take a break from tether ball to sip from fountains marked with Spanish and English placards: "SAFE TO DRINK."

The school, which draws on its own wells for its drinking fountains, sinks and cafeteria, is one of about 10 water systems in the farm region that have installed uranium removal facilities in recent years. Prices range from $65,000 for the smallest system to the millions of dollars.

maintenance chief jangles the keys to the school's treatment operation, locked in a shed the size of a garage. Inside, a system of tubes, dials and canisters resembling large scuba tanks removes up to a pound a year of uranium from the school's wells.

The uranium gleaned from the school's well water and other Central California water systems is handled like the nuclear material it is - taken away by workers in masks, gloves and other protective garments, said Ron Dollar, a vice president at Water Remediation Technology, a Colorado-based firm.

It is then processed into nuclear fuel for power plants, Dollar said.

Before treatment, Westport's water tests up to four times state and federal limits. After treatment, it's safe for the children, teachers and staff to drink.

Other Central California farm schools opt to buy bottled water in place of drinking fountains, which are off limits because of uranium and other contaminants.

"We don't have a choice," said Terri Lancaster, principal of the 260 students at Waukena elementary school in rural Tulare County. "You do what you have to do."

Until winning a state grant to pay for trucked-in drinking water, her school was spending $10,000 a year from its general fund on bottled water.

Meanwhile, the city of Modesto, with a half-million residents, recently spent more than $500,000 to start blending water from one contaminated well to dilute the uranium to safe



Image: AP Photo/John Locher



Image: AP Photo/John Locher

levels. The city has retired a half-dozen other wells with excess levels of uranium.

State officials don't track spending on uranium-contaminated wells. But the state's Water Resources Control Board identified at least $16.7 million the state has spent since 2010 helping public water systems deal with high levels of uranium.

In coming years, more public water systems likely will be compelled to invest in such costly fixes, said Miranda Fram, a researcher with the U.S. Geological Survey in Sacramento.

Fram and colleagues at USGS have taken the lead over the past decade in identifying the problem in farm centers including Central California, which produces a quarter of the country's agriculture.

Geologists and water experts are still piecing together the ways levels of uranium exceeding federal and state health standards are seeping into more public water systems and household wells in major farm areas.

Fram and her colleagues believe the amount of uranium increased in Central Valley drinking water supplies over the last 150 years with the spread of farming.

In California, as in the Rockies, mountain snowmelt washes uranium-laden sediment to the flatlands, where groundwater is used to irrigate crops.

Irrigation allows year-round farming, and the irrigated plants naturally create a weak acid that is leeching more and more uranium from sediment, said Fram and Bryant Jurgens, a fellow researcher at the federal agency's office in California's capital.

Image: AP Photo/John Locher



Groundwater pumping pulls the contaminated water down into the earth, where it is tapped by wells that supply drinking water.

California is now experiencing its driest four-year span on record, and farmers and other users are pumping groundwater at the highest rates ever, helping to pull yet more uranium into areas of aquifers tapped by water wells.

“This has been a decades-long process that has occurred,” Jurgens said.

And even if authorities were to intervene to somehow curb uranium contamination - and no such effort is under way - “we expect that it’s going to take many decades to reverse this,” Jurgens said.

The USGS calculates that the average level of uranium in public-supply wells of the eastern San Joaquin Valley increased 17 percent from 1990 to the mid-2000s. The number of public-supply wells with unsafe levels of uranium, meantime, climbed from 7 percent to 10 percent over the same period there.

But the problem remains so unpublicized that even Fresno County farmer Mark Sorensen - who grows grapes and blueberries in one of the most impacted parts of the country, and deals with water issues routinely as a leader of the local farm bureau - admits to not knowing about it.

“To be honest, I have never spoken to anybody about uranium,” said Sorensen, a fifth-generation farmer. “I’ve never even heard of it in drinking water.”

Scientists have long known that uranium can damage kidneys and increase the risks of cancer when consumed over a year or more, which is

why authorities have set maximum levels for drinking water.

Drinking water tainted by uranium is the chief concern - but uranium also sticks to potatoes, radishes and other root vegetables if they're not properly washed. (While studies have confirmed livestock and people can ingest high levels of uranium by eating contaminated vegetation, scientists have yet to fully research the dangers involved.)

Though people think mainly about uranium's radioactivity, the danger in water mainly comes from the toxic chemical effects of the metal.

Old public health models for uranium date back to the U.S. uranium boom of the 1940s and 1950s, when the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission set off a nuclear-age mining boom in the Central Valley and other points West as the country sought to build uranium stockpiles. Countless miners succumbed to cancer from breathing radioactive gas.

But those models now need revising to deal with the larger population exposed through sources like drinking water, academics say.

"We should not have any doubts as to whether drinking water with uranium in it is a problem or not. It is," said Doug Brugge, professor of public health and community medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. "The larger the population that's drinking this water, the more people that are going to be affected."

Because "there has not been an appreciation of the number of people exposed, it has received a lot less attention" than it should, said researcher Johnnye Lewis at the



Image: AP Photo/John Locher



University of New Mexico, which along with Brugge's team is studying the health impacts of uranium on communities.

Research teams at Tufts and the University of New Mexico also link long-term exposure to signs of reproductive and genetic damage, among other problems.

In California, changes in water standards since the late 2000s have mandated testing for uranium in public water systems, and the state frequently helps public water systems deal with wells testing at high levels.

For private well owners and small water systems, however, officials were unable to point to any public health campaigns in the most-affected areas or any help with testing or dealing with wells that do test for high levels.

USGS researchers recently sampled 170 domestic water wells in the San Joaquin Valley, and found 20 to 25 percent bore uranium at levels that broke federal and state limits.

State and federal regulators say the U.S. Congress, outlining drinking water standards, has limited their enforcement authority to public water systems. "Your home's your castle. If you've got a well at home, that's your business," said Bruce Macler, a San Francisco-based water program toxicologist for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Uranium is on the radar of California water officials, but the officials are paying more attention to other farming-related contaminants, including nitrates, as well as simply having enough water in the fourth year of the state's drought, said John Borkovich, head

of water quality at the state Water Resources Control Board.

"When it comes to private domestic wells, we do what we can to get the word out," Borkovich said. "It's safe to say that there's always more that can be done."

The Associated Press commissioned sampling of wells at five homes in the countryside outside Modesto, to look more closely at whether unregulated private wells that families depend on were as vulnerable as contaminated public water systems nearby.

The results: Water from two of the five wells contained dangerous levels of uranium.

None of the five families, however, had ever heard that uranium could be a problem in groundwater - let alone that it was a problem in their area.

"That's something I'm sure a lot of people are unaware of," said Reyna Rico, whose rural home overlooking farm fields had a well that tested three times the federal and state health limits.

"It would be nice to be informed, so we can make an informed decision, and those wells can be tested," said a resident nearby, Michelle Norleen, who was relieved to know that her own water - unlike those of two of her neighbors - tested below the limits in the AP sampling.

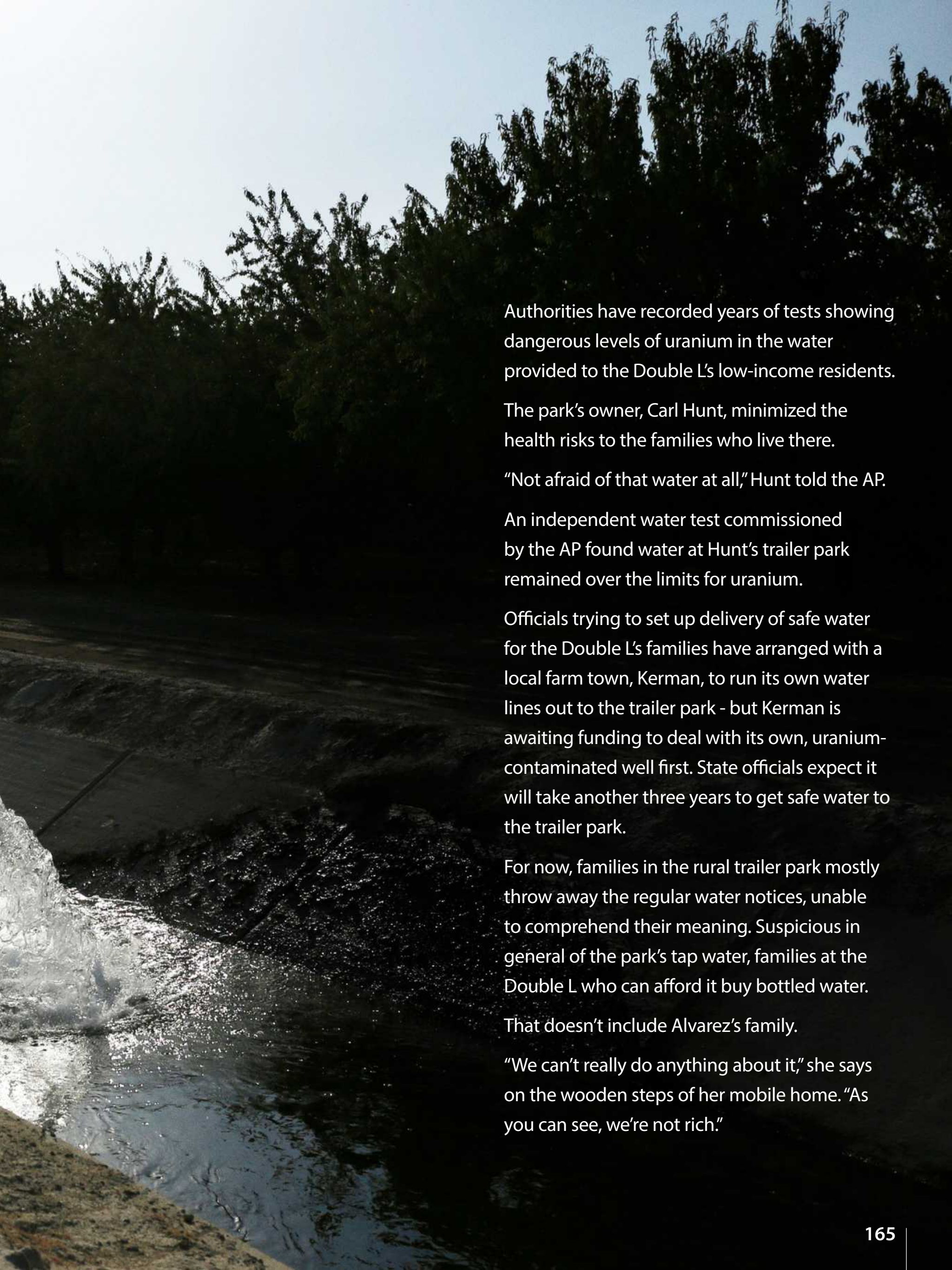
Even for bigger water systems for which government help is available, accessing safe water doesn't always come quickly. That's true at the Double L Mobile Ranch outside Fresno, where Giselle Alvarez lives in the one-room trailer with her mother and father.





Image: AP Photo/John Locher

Image: AP Photo/John Locher



Authorities have recorded years of tests showing dangerous levels of uranium in the water provided to the Double L's low-income residents.

The park's owner, Carl Hunt, minimized the health risks to the families who live there.

"Not afraid of that water at all," Hunt told the AP.

An independent water test commissioned by the AP found water at Hunt's trailer park remained over the limits for uranium.

Officials trying to set up delivery of safe water for the Double L's families have arranged with a local farm town, Kerman, to run its own water lines out to the trailer park - but Kerman is awaiting funding to deal with its own, uranium-contaminated well first. State officials expect it will take another three years to get safe water to the trailer park.

For now, families in the rural trailer park mostly throw away the regular water notices, unable to comprehend their meaning. Suspicious in general of the park's tap water, families at the Double L who can afford it buy bottled water.

That doesn't include Alvarez's family.

"We can't really do anything about it," she says on the wooden steps of her mobile home. "As you can see, we're not rich."

SCIENCE

LIFTOFF: 1ST US SHIPMENT IN MONTHS FLYING TO SPACE STATION

Image: John Raoux

A U.S. shipment of much-needed groceries and other astronaut supplies rocketed toward the International Space Station for the first time in months Sunday, reigniting NASA's commercial delivery service.

If the Orbital ATK capsule arrives at the space station Wednesday as planned, it will represent the first U.S. delivery since spring.

"Santa is on his way!" Tory Bruno, president of rocket maker United Launch Alliance, announced via Twitter.

More than anyone, perhaps, the six space station astronauts were thrilled following all the weather-related delays. They managed to photograph the rising rocket from their windows as both craft sailed over the Atlantic. "Caught something good on the horizon," commander Scott Kelly reported in a tweet.

To NASA's relief, the weather cooperated after three days of high wind and cloudy skies that kept the Atlas V rocket firmly on the ground. Everything came together on the fourth launch attempt, allowing the unmanned Atlas to blast off with 7,400 pounds of space station cargo, not to mention some Christmas presents for the awaiting crew.

Just before liftoff, Bruno urged, "Everyone cross your fingers and think happy weather thoughts." It apparently worked.

The Atlas soared through clouds and, 21 minutes later, ended up placing the Cygnus cargo carrier in the perfect orbit. Ecstatic launch controllers applauded, shook hands and hugged one another. "We're real happy to be back in space," said Frank Culbertson, president of Orbital's space systems group.



Image: John Raoux

Image: NASA / Aubrey Gemignani

United Launch Alliance manager Vernon Thorp couldn't help but notice all the number fours in Sunday's launch equation. Liftoff occurred at 4:44 p.m. on the fourth launch attempt, and Orbital's designation for the mission was - yep - number four. "I guess the numbers just all lined up right today," Thorp told reporters.

The space station astronauts - two of them, including Kelly, deep into a one-year mission - have gone without American shipments since April. Two private companies contracted for more than $3.5 billion by NASA to replenish the 250-mile-high lab are stuck on Earth with grounded rockets. Orbital ATK bought the United Launch Alliance's rocket, the veteran Atlas V, for this supply mission.

Orbital's previous grocery run, its fourth, ended in a fiery explosion seconds after liftoff in October 2014. SpaceX, the other supplier, suffered a launch failure in June on its eighth trip.

Russia also lost a supply ship earlier this year. But it picked up the slack and has another resupply mission scheduled just before Christmas; Japan has chipped in as well.

Much-needed food is inside Orbital's cargo carrier, named Cygnus after the swan constellation. NASA normally likes to have a six-month stash of food aboard the space station, but it's down a couple months because of the three failed flights. Space station program manager Kirk Shireman expects it will take another year to get the pantry full again - provided there are no more accidents.

Also aboard the newest Cygnus capsule: clothes, toiletries, spacewalking gear, air-supply tanks and science experiments.

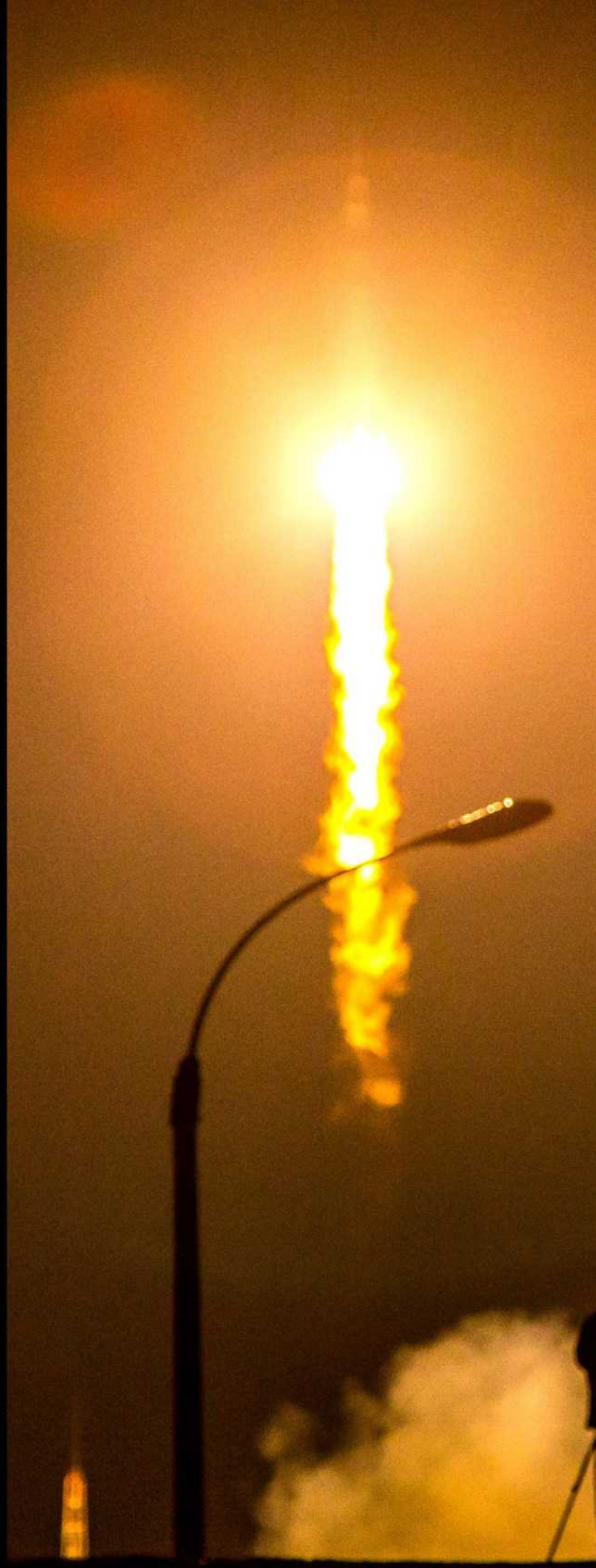
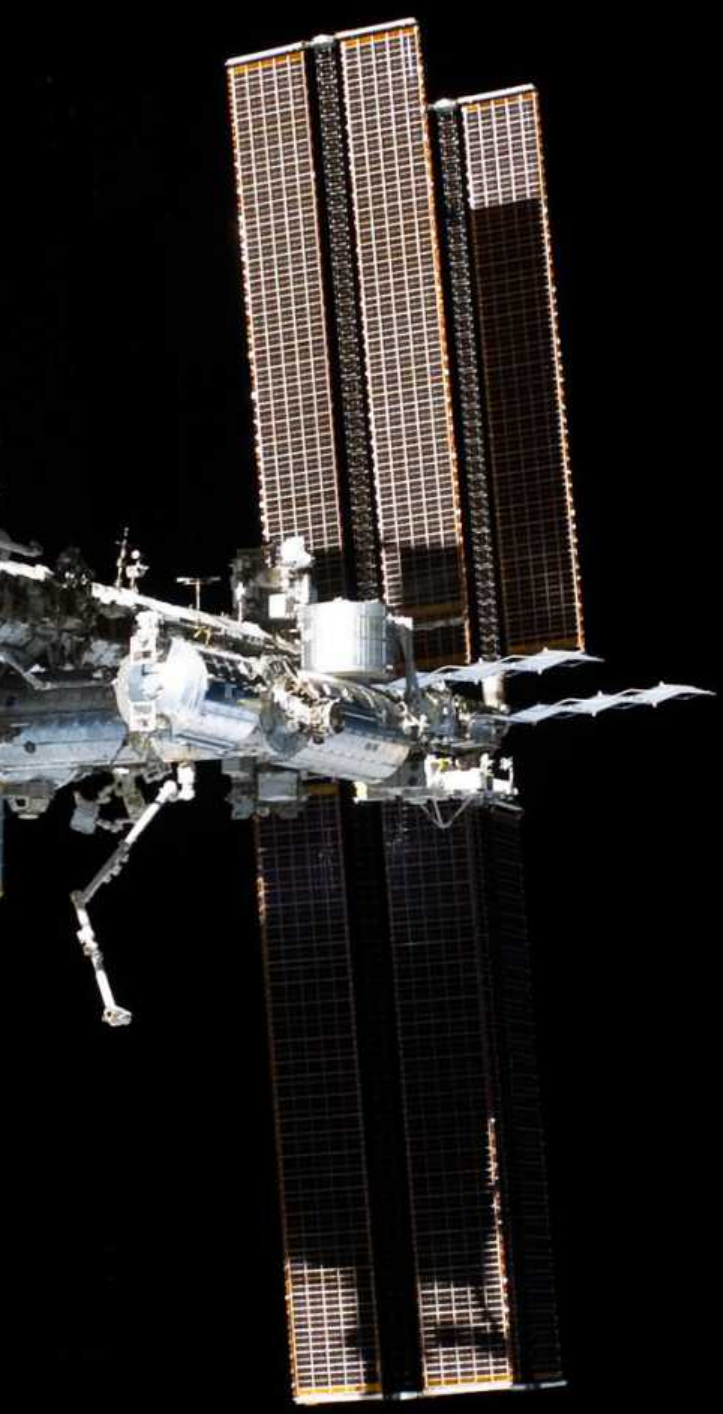




Image: NASA/Bill Ingalls



Image: NASA



This is the first time that the United Launch Alliance's Atlas V has served the space station. Normally used for hefty satellite launches, it is the mighty successor to the Atlas used to put John Glenn into orbit in 1962. Boeing intends to use the Atlas V to boost the Starliner capsules it's building to ferry astronauts to the space station beginning in 2017.

Orbital plans to use another Atlas rocket for a supply run in March, then return its own Antares rocket to flight from Virginia in May.

SpaceX - also part of NASA's commercial crew effort - aims to restart station deliveries in January with its Falcon rockets.

While acknowledging 2015 has been a difficult year because of the disrupted supply chain, Shireman said commercial space is inevitable and will drive down launch costs. NASA's 30-year shuttle program proved expensive and complicated, and, on two flights, deadly.

"It is our future," Shireman stressed last week.

The Cygnus launched Sunday is named after Mercury 7 astronaut Deke Slayton, a pioneer in commercial spaceflight before his death in 1993.

Online:

Orbital ATK: **www.orbitalatk.com**

NASA: **www.nasa.gov**

GERMAN AUTOMAKERS WANT REAL-TIME CAR DATA FOR MAPS APP



Audi, BMW and Daimler want to turn their cars into real-time sensors that will provide data to the HERE map service they recently purchased from Nokia, the German automakers said Monday.

The aim is to speed up the development of more powerful maps needed for automated driving and other applications, but also to fend off the threat from smartphone-based rivals such as Google and Apple.

We want HERE to become the world's best reality index, said Rupert Stadler, the chief executive of Audi. This index knows what happens where, in the very moment. It is a live representation of the world.

Data collected by cars won't be limited to traffic information. Windscreen wiper use, for example, will also be transmitted to indicate weather conditions.




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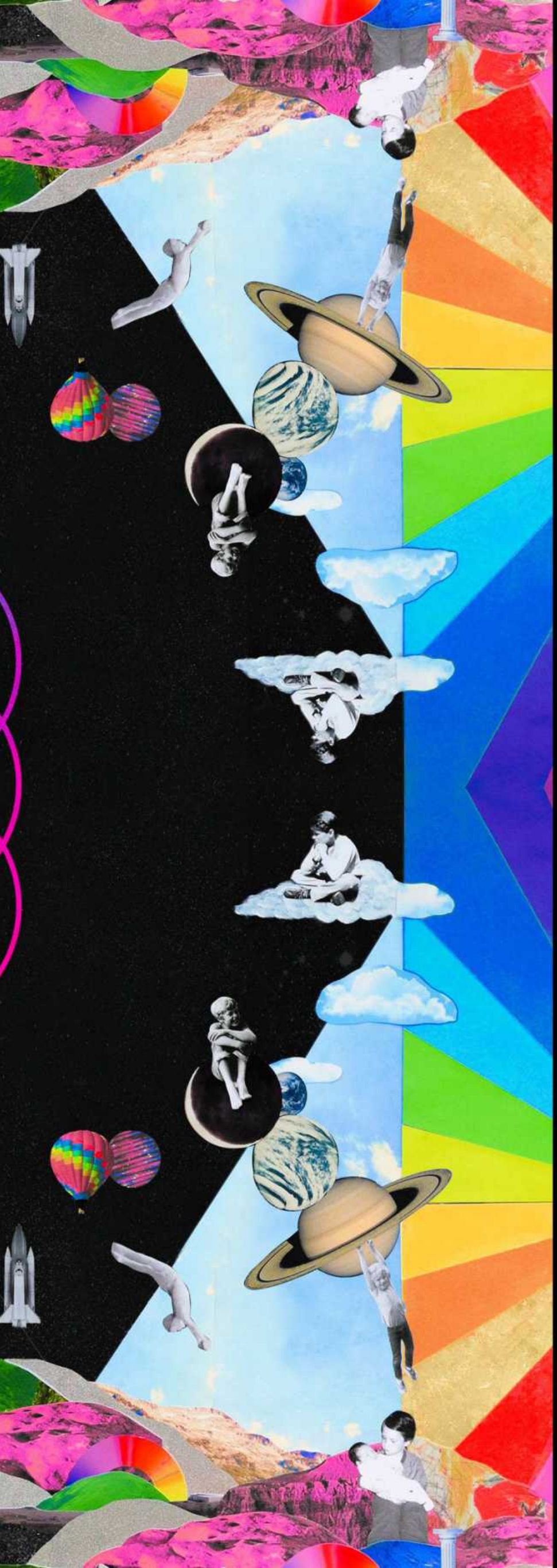
In a nod to consumers' privacy concerns, all information will be anonymized. The cars will send data about the current driving situation but not about the driver, said BMW's chief technology officer, Klaus Froehlich. It will be supplemented with data provided from smartphones, wearable devices and even traffic lights, he added.

The automakers will each hold a 13rd stake in the company, but the aim is to take a hands-off approach to ownership. The companies will encourage other car manufacturers to cooperate with the service by also providing data, a move that would pit the auto industry against Google and Apple, whose smartphone apps are increasingly used by drivers.

HERE president Sean Fernback said the backing of three major automakers, who jointly paid 2.5 billion euros ($2.7 billion) for the company, would allow it to develop a new generation of high-definition maps and fill out the white spaces in its service - notably China.

We have a healthy financial position so we are able to afford the substantial sums required to succeed in building what we envisage, he said.





MUSIC REVIEW: COLDPLAY HAS A DANCE PARTY ON NEW ALBUM

Coldplay, "A Head Full of Dreams" (Parlophone/Atlantic)

Get out your disco ball. Coldplay has dabbled with dance music before but on the band's new set, "A Head Full of Dreams," Chris Martin and co. have gone full tilt.

While still recognizable for its sweeping, ambitious anthems, this is Coldplay with 50 percent more twirl. Credit (or blame) Norwegian production duo Stargate, best known for its work with Beyonce, Rihanna and Katy Perry, who co-produced the set and put the extra pep in Coldplay's step.

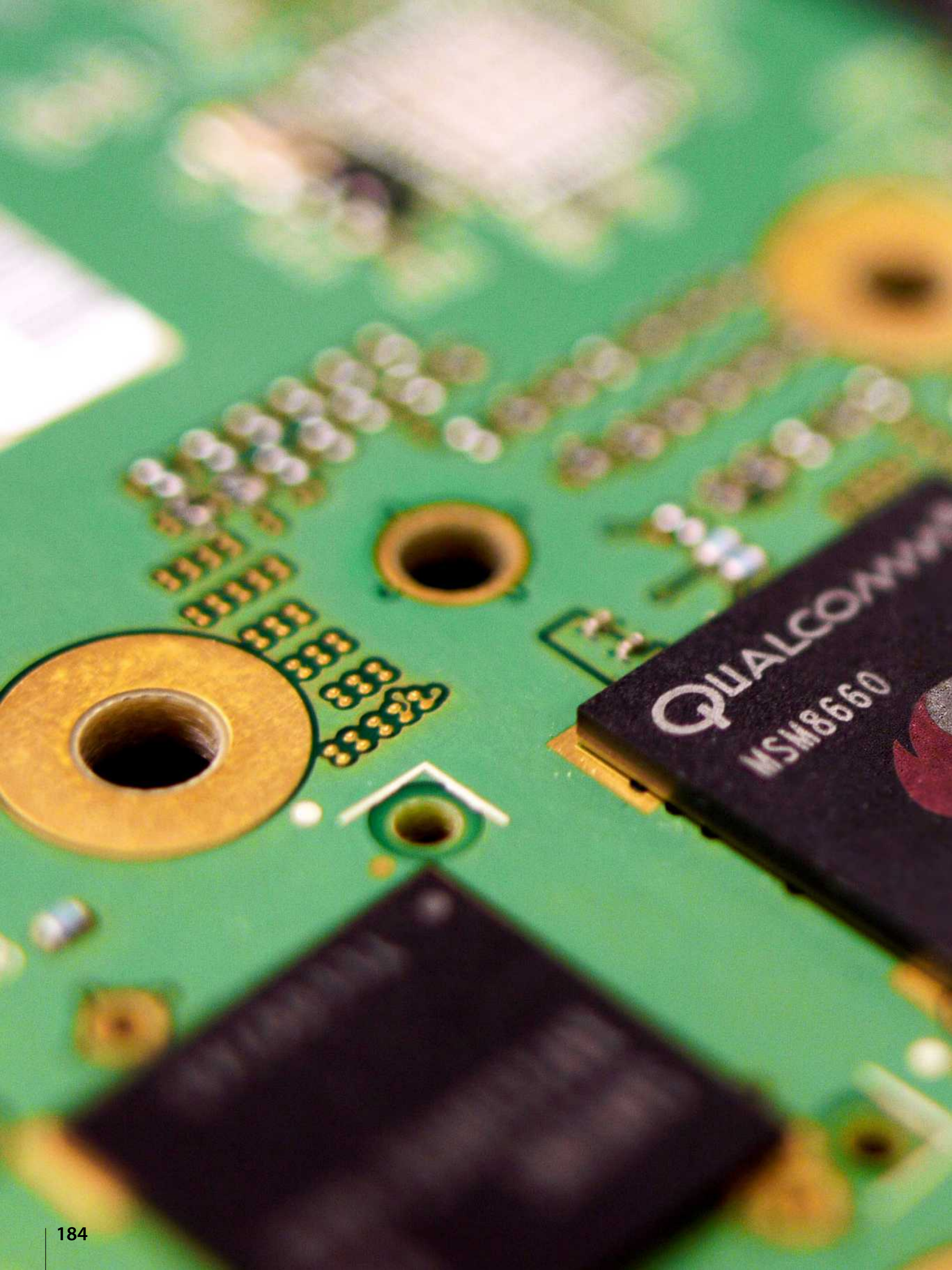
Image: Gary He

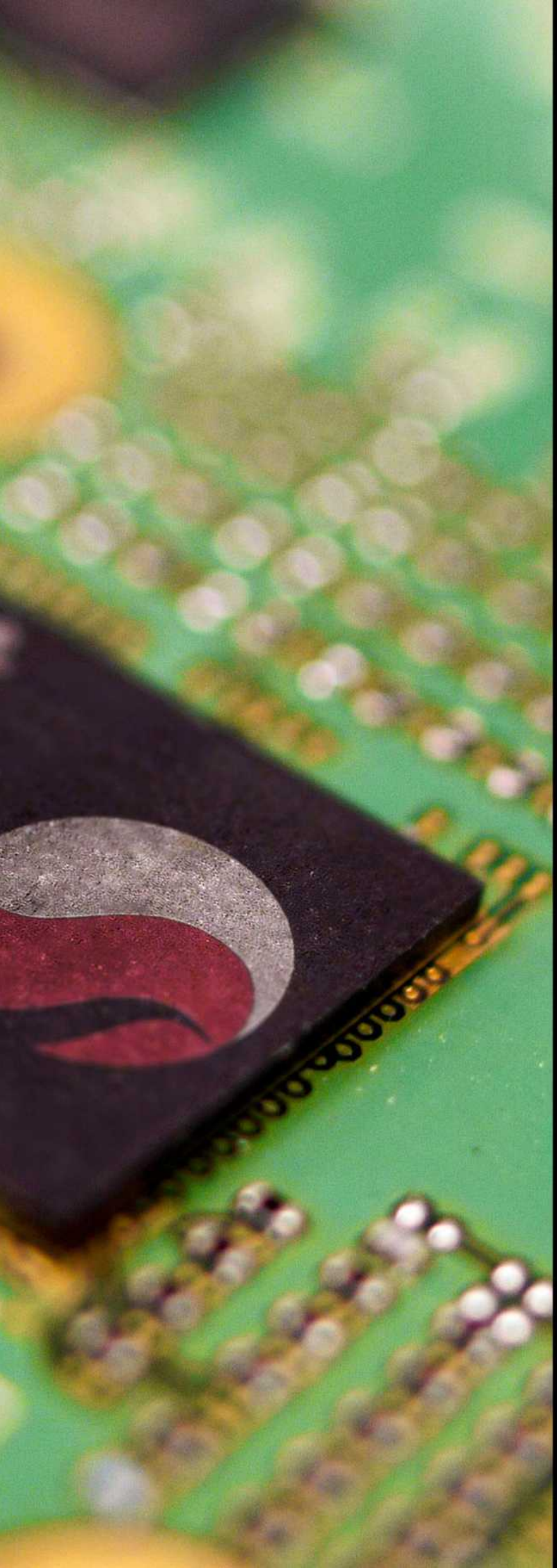


And speaking of Beyonce, she opens the lilting "Hymn for the Weekend," which also features programming by Avicii. Swedish sensation Tove Lo drops by on "Fun," a song about Martin's conscious uncoupling from Gwyneth Paltrow that puts a positive glow on their split. To further prove there are no hard feelings, Paltrow sings on "Everglow," a bittersweet ballad about the ties that bind even after the marital cord has been cut.

All the wistful bonhomie becomes a bit precious on "Birds," which cuts off mid-song, and on "Kaleidoscope," which features a spoken-word recitation by poet Coleman Barks that encourages welcoming the awareness life's changes bring. Lyrically, Martin strives to find the silver lining in every disappointment, especially on the feel-good album closer "Up&Up."

And if you can dance to it, all the better, as the British quartet will undoubtedly prove when it headlines the Super Bowl 50 halftime show on Feb. 7.


QUALCOMM
MSM8660



EU STARTS ANTI-TRUST ACTION AGAINST QUALCOMM

The European Union's anti-trust watchdog says it suspects that Qualcomm illegally made exclusivity payments to a major customer and sold chipsets below cost to force a competitor out of the market.

The EU's executive Commission said Tuesday it has issued a "statement of objections" to the San Diego-based chipmaker, the first formal step in EU anti-trust actions.



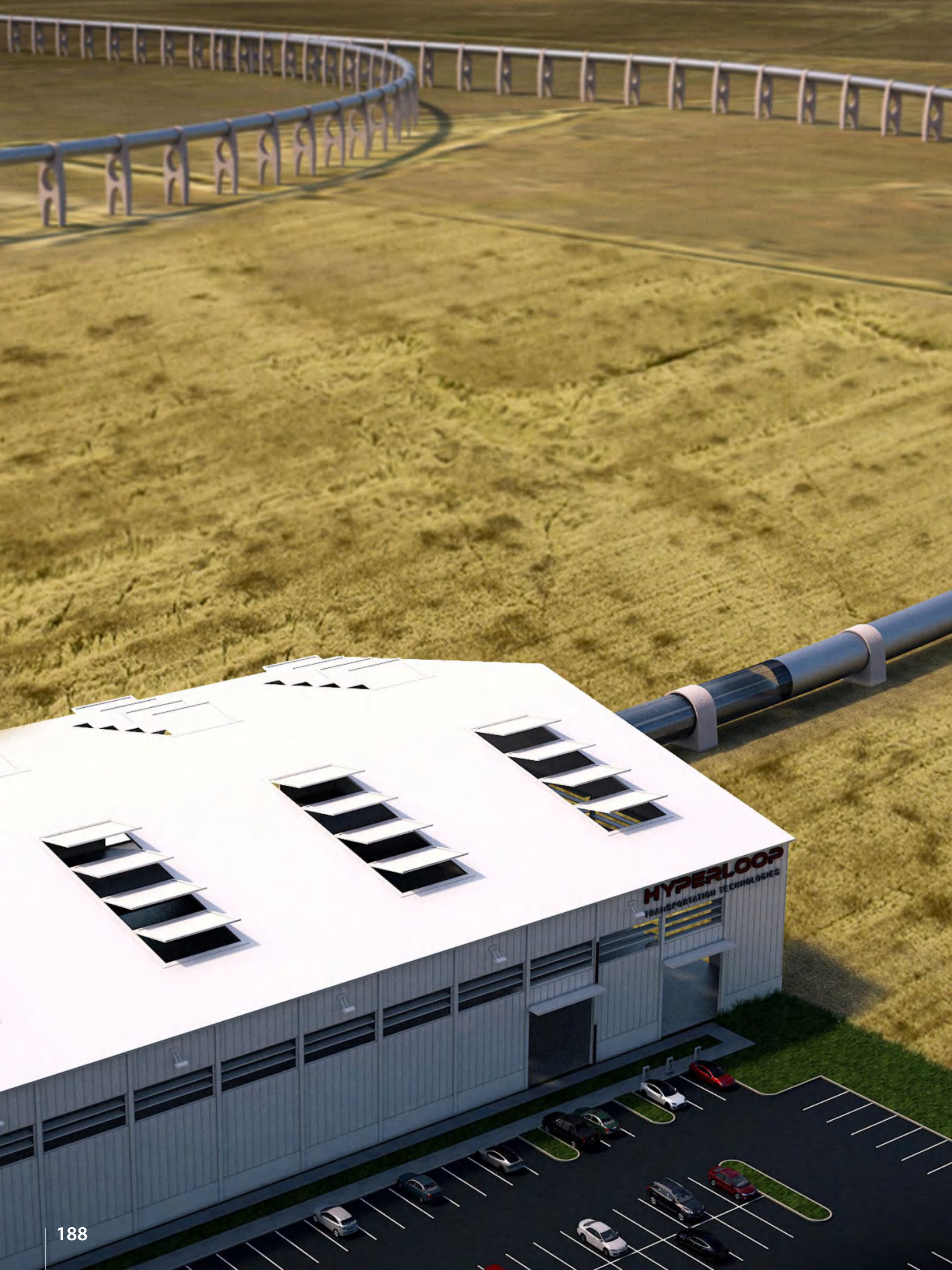
Image: Gary He



The Commission said company payments to an unnamed smartphone and tablet manufacturer "reduced the manufacturer's incentives to source chipsets from Qualcomm's competitors and has harmed competition and innovation."

It also accused Qualcomm of "'predatory pricing' by selling certain baseband chipsets at prices below costs, with the intention of hindering competition in the market."

Qualcomm has three to four months to respond to the allegations and request a hearing.


HYPERLOOP
TRANSPORTATION TECHNOLOGIES



HYPERLOOP TO TEST SUPER-RAPID TRANSPORT IN NORTH LAS VEGAS

A California company set on building a futuristic, super high-speed transportation system announced Tuesday that it will build a test track in North Las Vegas.

Hyperloop Technologies' test will involve sending an electrical motor at more than 300 mph on a half-mile track. Hardware is expected to arrive this month, and testing is projected to begin early next year.

The hyperloop technology aims to use vacuum tubes to transport freight and passengers in pods at speeds up to 750 mph. With little wind resistance, the system could zip people around at the speed of sound and cut the 400-mile ride between Los Angeles and San Francisco down to an hour.

Capsules would float on a thin cushion of air and draw on magnetic attraction and solar power to zoom through a nearly airless tube.

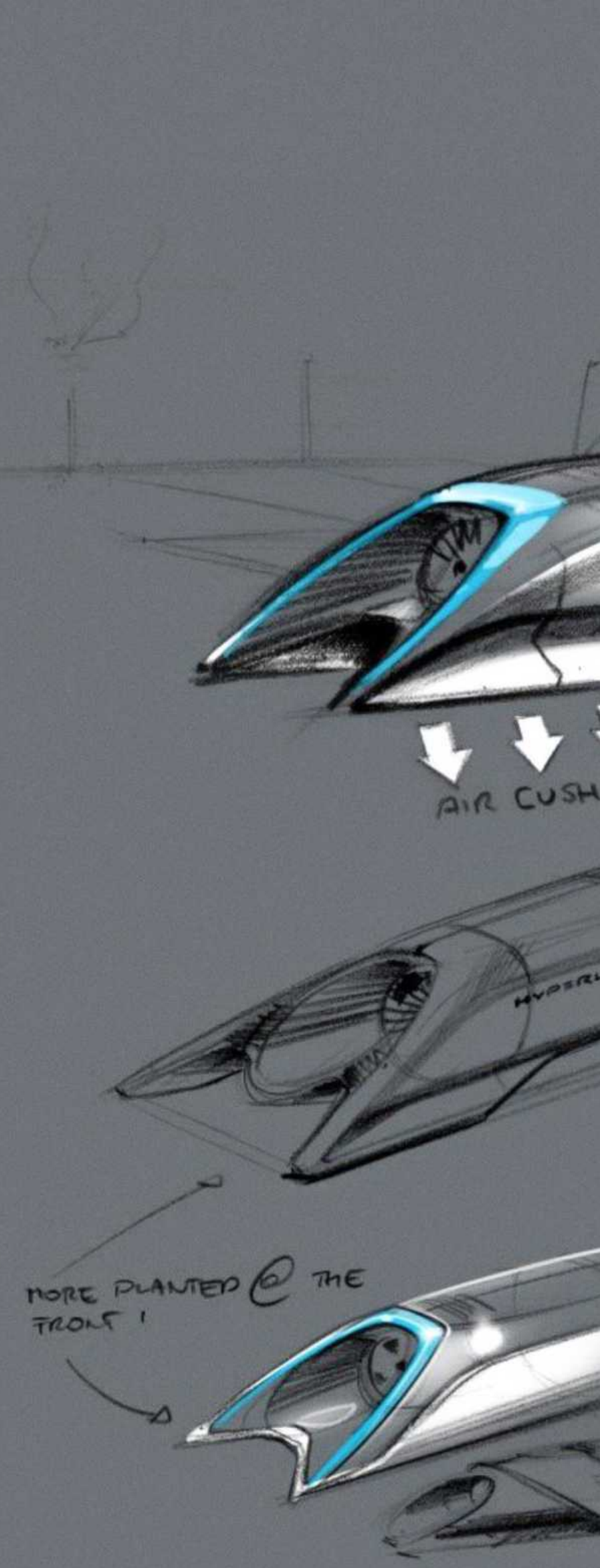
"This decision represents another major milestone in our journey to bring Hyperloop to commercial reality," Rob Lloyd, CEO of the Los Angeles-based company, said in a statement. "Hyperloop Technologies will invest first in regions where we receive government advocacy to move fast."

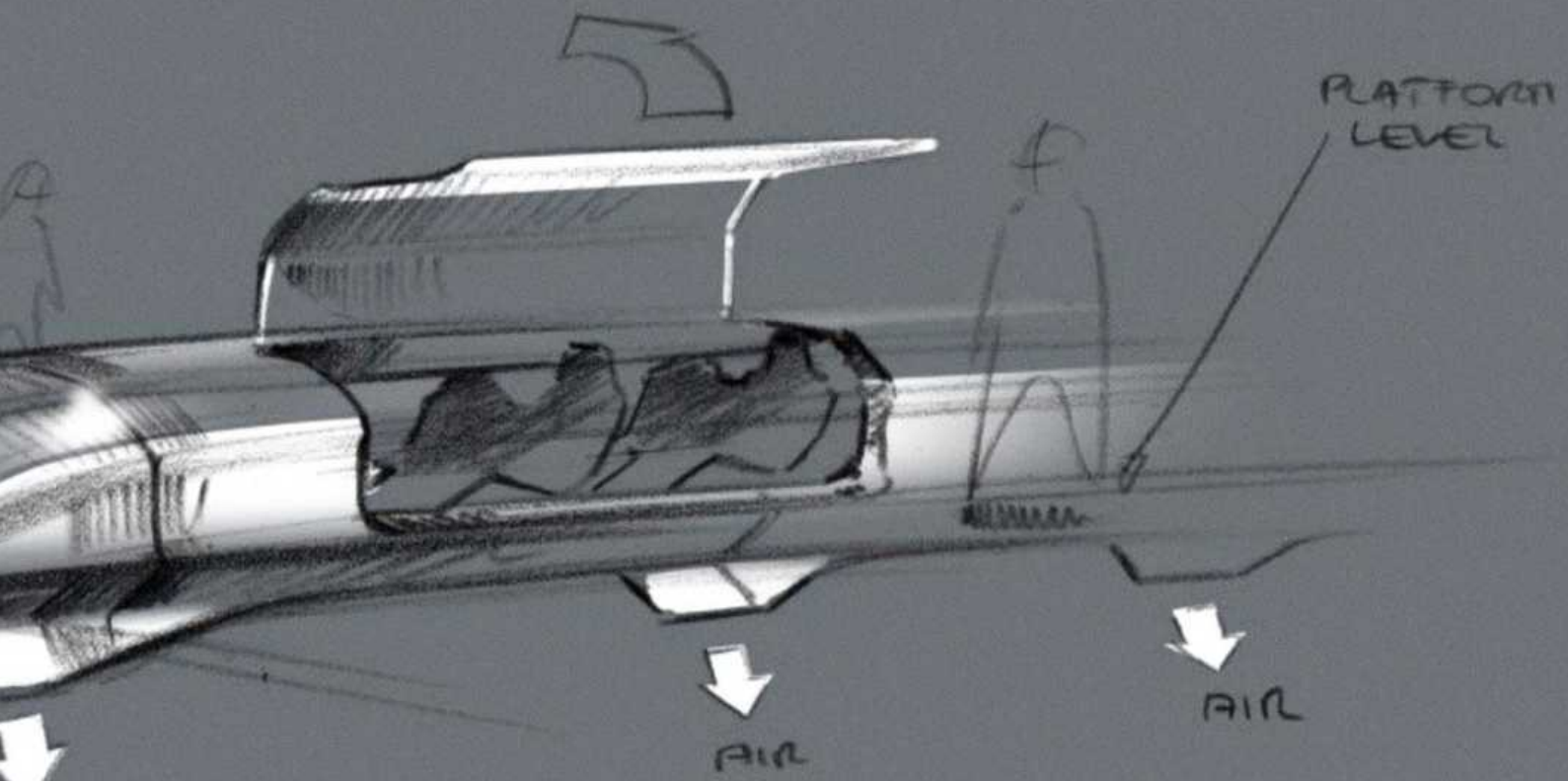
The company says it's still looking for a site to build a 2-mile test track and conduct more extensive testing.

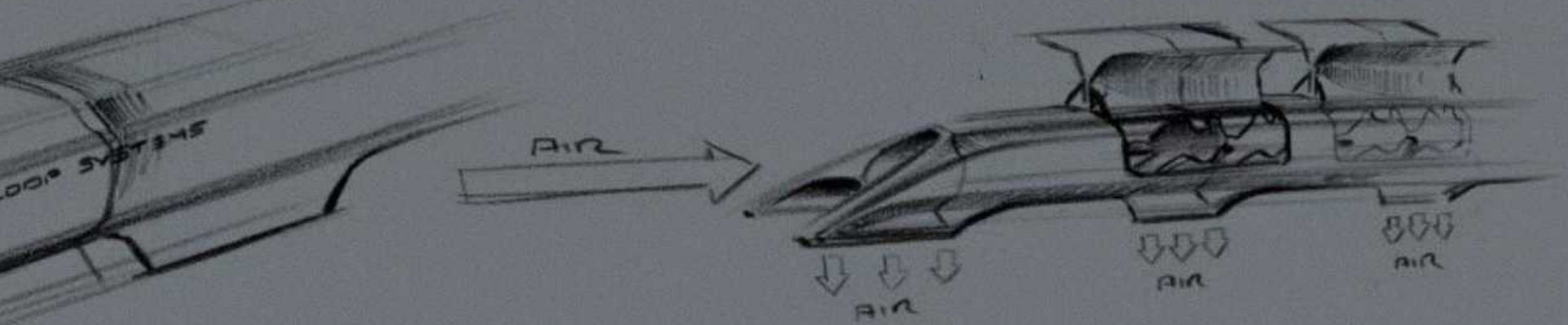
Tesla and SpaceX billionaire Elon Musk first publicly theorized about the project in 2013, and is backing an engineering competition aimed at bringing the vision alive. Musk has suggested that building an actual Hyperloop system would cost $6 billion, although others suggest the figure will be much higher.

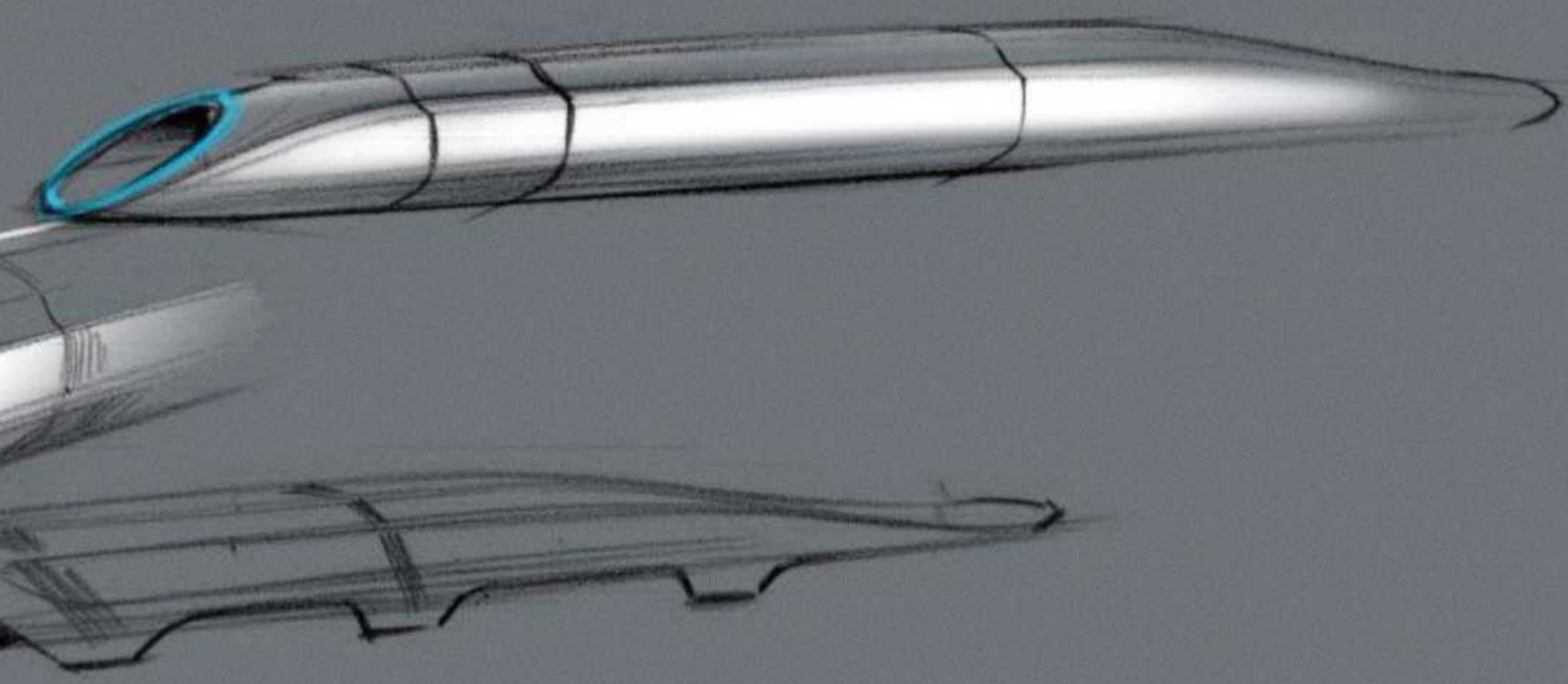
News of the development is a boon for North Las Vegas, a city of about 220,000 that experienced rapid growth in the early 2000s before teetering on the edge of insolvency when the recession hit.

Officials there are also hoping for an economic jolt from electric car company Faraday Future, which is expected to announce any day now whether California, Georgia, Louisiana or Nevada has landed its $1 billion proposed factory and an estimated 4,500 jobs.




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